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ABSTRACT

The present situation in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) regarding primary school drop-out and repetition, with special reference to the situation of the girl child, is examined in this study. The in-school as well as out-of-school causes of primary school drop-out are examined, and solutions that help reduce or eliminate the problem in the region are introduced. Part I presents a brief description of the purpose, the methodology, the organization, and the limitations of the study. Part II seeks to stress the importance of studying the drop-out problem in primary education in general, followed by an assessment of its characteristics and extent in MENA countries. In Part III, underlying causes of the drop-out problem in primary school are discussed, with special references to the factors leading to girls' drop out. In the final section, culture-sensitive action recommendations are provided to help meet the drop-out challenge. Twenty four strategies are introduced in five categories: child-centered, family-centered, community-centered, education-oriented, and leadership-oriented recommendations, which include: provide preparatory training, mobile counseling units, and peer tutoring; establish houses of culture; provide continued education for drop-outs; involve the family; raise the family awareness; empower the family; introduce educated role models; mobilize influential members of the community; adapt the school to local conditions and needs; equip the teachers; make the school child friendly; delegate responsibility to the students; introduce organizational reform; provide non-formal education alternatives; gather accurate data about school drop-out; raise public awareness about drop-out; provide opportunities for continued education; provide education loans; and foster sister schools. Contains 62 references. (AA)

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GIRLS' DROP-OUT FROM PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA:

CHALLENGES AND ALTERNATIVES

by Golnar Mehrah
Education Consultant (UNICEF - Tehran)

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by

Golnar Mehran

Education Consultant

UNICEF - Tehran

PREPARED FOR

UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office

Amman, Jordan

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Preface

One of the tasks facing many governments of the region is how to revitalize and make their existing basic education services more responsive to the changing social, economic and political needs of a future threatened by political uncertainty and increased competition for shrinking regional resources.

Despite a total annual growth rate of first level school enrollments reaching an average of 3.8 per cent per annum between 1975 and 1991, there has not been a corresponding improvement in the quality of basic education. Increasing levels of drop-out and repetition attest to the presence of significant inefficiencies which reflect diminishing national education budgets, a drop in teacher performance, a shortage of adequate learning materials which have resulted in a decline in first cycle achievement levels.

Girls seem to be the group most affected by the overall decline in the quality of primary education. For despite earlier improvements in the education of girls, their situation still remains relatively poor compared to boys. Whereas the average female enrollment ratio was 54 in 1975 rising to 75 per cent by 1992 and the corresponding ratios for males were 85 and 92 per cent, current projections suggest that about 22 per cent of the region's children in the 6-11 year cohort will not be enrolled by the year 2000. The majority of this group will continue to be girls if these trends remain unchanged.

The Universalization of Primary Education (UPE) and the eradication of adult illiteracy will be unattained goals if the wastage rates resulting from drop-out and repetition persist. More efforts will be needed to improve the overall quality and relevance of basic education, particularly with respect to curriculum, teaching methods, learning materials and educational assessment, if MENA is to tackle the problem of inefficiency and wastage in a significant and sustained way.

Dr. Golnar Mehran's comparative study, which was commissioned in 1994, attempts to address the underlying qualitative issues contributing to our regional phenomena of high numbers of girls dropping out of the school system by linking drop-out and repetition, to identifiable out-of-school and in-school factors.

The focus of her comprehensive review of available reports, studies and qualitative data highlighted common set of qualitative factors which may be supporting and exacerbating the girls drop-out and repetition problem at the primary level, in the MENA region. Her list of 24 action recommendations, in the form of a well conceptualized matrix, provides a timely and needed dimension to the regional and international discussion currently being articulated by Arab educators, on these important issues.

Dr. Frank Dall,
Regional Education Adviser,
UNICEF, MENARO, Amman, Jordan

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Golnar Mehran
UNICEF Education Consultant
March 1995

Definition of Terms

ARAB STATES (UNESCO): refers to the 21 Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Yemen (made up of the former Democratic Yemen and the former Arab Republic).

DROP-OUT: perhaps the most critical form of wastage, refers to the inability of the school to retain the pupil after he/she has enrolled in school. A primary school drop-out is a child who enrolls in school but fails to complete the primary level of the educational system; this means that the drop-out fails to reach the final grade, usually grade V or VI. (UNESCO 1984)

EDUCATIONAL EFFICIENCY: a) the *internal efficiency* of an educational system refers to its ability to keep pupils in schools, or make them attend educational programmes, and to process them without delay or wastage through each level of the education system; b) *the external efficiency* of an educational system refers to how well schools prepare students for their roles in society, as indicated by their employment prospects and earnings. (Psacharapoulos et.al. 1985)

GENDER GAP: refers to the extent to which female access to, persistence and achievement in education lag behind male access, persistence and achievement (Rihani 1993).

GRADE V ENROLLMENT: refers to the percentage of children who have completed four years of primary schooling -- the minimum required to receive a basic education. (UNICEF 1993)

GROSS ENROLLMENT RATE: is calculated by dividing total enrollment for a particular level of education, regardless of age, by the total population which,

according to official regulations, should be enrolled. The values obtained for this rate are influenced by the incidence of repetition and late entrance, and may exceed 100 per cent (UNESCO 1994).

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION (UNICEF MENA): refers to the 20 countries in the Mediterranean/Persian Gulf region: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, the West Bank and Gaza, and the republic of Yemen (formerly the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic). UNICEF - MENARO refers to the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office.

PERSISTENCE RATE: refers to the percentage of students who begin and complete a particular level of education, that is, the percentage of students who do not drop out of the system (Rihani 1993).

REPEATER: refers to a child who has to repeat the same grade due to a variety of reasons, including examination failure and low attendance record. A repeater may or may not become a drop-out, but there is a high probability that he/she will (UNESCO 1984). Repetition is a major indicator of educational efficiency and an important index of wastage.

SURVIVAL RATE: refers to the number of pupils reaching each grade. Survival in primary education, or the evolution of a cohort of 1,000 pupils entering primary school, is determined by using the Reconstructed Cohort Method. The transition rates -- promotion, repetition and drop-out -- are maintained constant and the resulting proportions of children reaching subsequent grades of primary school provide estimates of the holding power of the education system (UNESCO 1994).

WASTAGE: refers to both repetition and drop-out. Wastage is closely associated with socio-economic conditions; wastage is usually highest where poverty is greatest (UNESCO 1984).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite significant improvement in the status of girls' education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a gross enrollment rate of 75.2 per cent in 1985, many school-age girls still remain left out of the educational system. Among those who enter first grade (89 per cent), many fail to reach grade V (19 per cent). The problem is even more acute among poor rural girls, where the poverty, rural residence, and being a female triangle is a determinant factor of school non-attendance or incompletion.

The purpose of this study is to assess the educational status of the MENA region with regard to primary school drop-out and repetition, and with special reference to the situation of the girl child. It further seeks to identify the in-school as well as out-of-school causes of primary school drop-out, especially among girls. Finally, it aims at introducing solutions that help reduce or eliminate the primary school drop-out problem in the region.

Drop-out, or the inability of the school to retain a child once he/she has enrolled, is usually an end result of repetition. Not only is it a sign of educational wastage and inefficiency, it also leads to relapse into illiteracy and psychological distress for the child. Drop-out can occur at any grade of primary school, but there is evidence that female drop-out occurs mostly at grade IV or V in the MENA region. The girl child may be pulled out of school when she is believed to be physically mature and unable to attend school with boys of her own age and/or taught by a male teacher. She may also be considered to be ready for marriage and thus withdrawn to start preparing for "real life". More often, however, she is pulled out due to poverty and the need for her labour at home and outside.

There are significant differences in enrollment, drop-out, and repetition rates in MENA countries as well as within nations between boys and girls and the rural and urban sector. In general Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are far better than Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen as far as primary education indicators are concerned. The highest gender disparity rates exist in Yemen, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Djibouti and Saudi Arabia.

The search for causes of drop-out in the region has led to distinguishing between in-school and out-of-school factors. In-school phenomena refer to the factors directly related to the formal schooling system, including the affected school, classroom, curriculum, teacher and teaching methods, examination and student achievement, and extra-curricular activities. In this study, eighty questions were asked to aid educators to find out the internal reasons responsible for school drop-out. Out-of-school phenomena, on the other hand, encompass the social, economic, political and cultural milieu in which the children live and, as the name implies, locate the roots of school drop-out out of the locus of the school. In the search for the hindering factors leading to school drop-out, three sets of causes were uncovered: 1) School-centered reasons or push-out factors, that act within the school to push the child out of the educational system; 2) family-centered reasons, that pull the child out of school due to economic, social or cultural beliefs and/or necessities; and 3) child-centered reasons, that eventually lead the child to drop-out of the system in what appears to be his/her choice but may in fact be the result of final surrender to push - and pull-out factors.

In the final section, culture-sensitive action recommendations are provided to help meet the drop-out challenge. The recommendations are categorized in five sections, encompassing the child, his/her family and community, the school (both the formal system and the non-formal alternative), and the educational leadership. Twenty four strategies are thus introduced in five categories : child-centered, family-centered, community-centered, education-oriented, and leadership-oriented recommendations, which are as follows:

1. Provide Preparatory Training
2. Provide Mobile Counselling Units
3. Provide Peer Tutoring
4. Establish Houses of Culture
5. Provide Continued Education for Drop-Outs
6. Involve the Family
7. Raise the Family's Awareness
8. Empower the Family
9. Introduce Educated Role Models
10. Invite Speakers

11. Mobilize Influential Members of the Community
12. Adapt the School to Local Conditions and Needs
13. Equip the Teachers
14. Make the School Child-Friendly
15. Delegate Responsibility to the Students
16. Introduce Organizational Reform
17. Provide Non-Formal Education Alternatives
18. Gather Accurate Data About School Drop-Out
19. Allocate Budget to Reduce School Drop-Out
20. Utilize Modern and Traditional channels of Communication to Raise Public Awareness About Drop-Out
21. Provide Opportunities to Continue Education
22. Promote Fund Raising Activities
23. Provide Education Loans
24. Foster Sister Schools

The study concludes with an easy to read matrix identifying the causes of and solutions to the school drop-out problem in the Middle East and North Africa.

I. INTRODUCTION

Available statistics point to significant improvement in the status of girls' education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with a more than double increase in female gross enrollment rates at the primary school level, from 34.4 per cent in 1960 to 75.2 per cent in 1985 (Rihani 1993 : 13). Yet girls remain left out of the educational system and many continue to drop out from primary schools in the region. According to The Progress of Nations (1993), 89 per cent of children in the MENA region enter grade I, but only 81 per cent of them reach grade V. The retention rate is lower among poor, rural girls in each country. There is also significant variation among countries. For example, only 5 per cent of Lebanese females are left out of the educational system, while 69 per cent of girls in Djibouti remain out of primary school. At the same time, Bahrain reports only a 1 per cent female drop-out by grade IV, whereas 28 per cent of fourth grade Yemeni girls drop out of school. Female completion rates further decrease as the grades go up, with the result that the final grade completion rate is lower than the rate for grade IV in all MENA countries. The above realities have led to reduced educational efficiency and continuing gender gap in the region. They also pose the question as to why Middle Eastern and North African countries have failed to keep their children in school once they have entered the first grade and why persistence rates are lower among girls?

1. Purpose of the Study

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the present situation in the MENA region regarding primary school drop-out and repetition, with special reference to the situation of the girl child?

2. What are the in-school and out-of-school causes of primary school drop-out, especially among girls?

3. What are the formal and non-formal solutions that seek to reduce or eliminate the drop-out problem at the primary level in MENA countries?

2. Methodology and Organization of the Study

To answer the above questions, the study is divided into three sections: assessment, analysis and action. The first section provides an assessment of the present situation with special attention to regional variation and gender differences. The educational status of MENA countries is illustrated on the basis of the following primary education indicators:

a) enrollment rates (gross and net)
b) gender disparity
c) repetition rate
d) drop-out rate
e) grade IV completion rate
f) final grade completion rate
g) survival rate
h) transition from primary to secondary school level.

The portrayal of educational status is aimed at providing a comparative and macro-assessment of achievements and shortcomings in the region, with focus on the gender gap.

Section two analyzes the in-school and out-of-school causes of drop-out, hereafter referred to as hindering factors. The information in this section is based on data provided to the present researcher by UNICEF country offices for use in this study. The findings of the study are limited to the reports provided by: Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen, due to reasons mentioned later in this study. The third section provides action recommendations, referred to as facilitating factors, that help ameliorate the drop-out problem and improve the efficiency of the primary school system. The study concludes with a set of guidelines to reduce or eliminate primary school drop-out in the MENA region, presented in an easy to read matrix form.

3. Limitation of the Study

The analytical section of this study is based on a review of available research and statistical data on the drop-out problem in MENA. As such, it is limited in scope due to the

following reasons:

1. The search for relevant studies is limited to official UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank and government reports sent by country offices in English, French or Arabic. Reliance on written official reports, without field research and firsthand interviews and observation, has been a restriction brought about by a limited budget and contrained travel opportunities.

2. The researcher had to rely on the contribution of country offices. Despite numerous requests for information during a period of four months, only eleven out of the 20 MENA county offices responded. Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen contributed by sending information on the status of education in their country, some of which included specific research conducted on the female drop-out problem. The lack of cooperation on the part of some MENA country offices may have been caused by lack of information on, interest in, or attention to the education of girls and school drop-out in their respective countries. Whatever the reason may be, their inability to respond posed a limitation on this study.

3. Inadequate regional data is a problem that limits the assessment of the drop-out situation. Lack of accurate, reliable and standardised data, disaggregated by gender and sector, continues to pose obstacles to effective research and evaluation in MENA.

4. Last, but not least, was the lack of access to updated international literature on school drop-out available in Iran - where the researcher works and lives.

II. ASSESSMENT OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL DROP-OUT PROBLEM IN THE MENA REGION

This section seeks to stress the importance of studying the drop-out problem in primary education in general, followed by an assessment of its characteristics and extent in

MENA countries. I should begin by answering a few questions.

1) **What is school drop-out and why is it important to eliminate it?**

Drop-out occurs when, having enrolled a child in school, the school fails to retain the child. (UNESCO 1984). A drop-out is, therefore, a child who fails to complete the relevant level of the educational cycle. Although drop-out occurs at both the primary and secondary levels, it is more critical at the first level since there is a high probability that a primary school drop-out will not re-enter the formal educational system and that he/she will not be able to retain the academic skills gained earlier in the school. Today's primary school drop-out is usually tomorrow's illiterate.

School drop-out, usually the end result of repetition, is a painful form of wastage not only because it points to an inefficient educational system in which the school fails to retain its students but also because of the psychological impact it has on the drop-out him/herself. Traditionally, researchers tended to focus on the large-scale consequences of drop-out, such as wastage, educational inefficiency, illiteracy, inability to attain education for all, obstacle to the development of human resources and hindrance to economic growth. But there is also need for an in-depth study of the psychological impact of premature school leaving on individuals.

The financial loss brought about by school drop-out and its negative impact on the socio-economic development of the country may be illustrated in figures and percentages. Yet numbers can never measure the impact on human dignity and self-esteem of the child who experiences failure early in life. The causes of drop-out may well be external and not related to the academic performance of the child, yet he/she will come to internalize failure and allow it to affect his/her performance in adult years.

Early school drop-out can lead to a relapse into illiteracy. According to UNESCO, literacy skills (reading, writing and arithmetic) are usually

retained upon the completion of grade IV, and UNICEF has declared four years of primary school as the minimum required if a child is to receive a basic education. Leaving school before that stage and the virtual impossibility of re-entry into the formal educational system may, therefore, lead to a return to illiteracy. As such, drop-out is a serious problem that adds to the pool of illiterates. Illiteracy is the result of the inability of formal education to absorb all school-age children as well as the school's failure to retain its pupils until the end of the primary cycle -- namely, drop-out. Eliminating drop-out would therefore enhance educational efficiency as well as act as a "boost" to the national literacy rate.

2) **Where is the drop-out phenomenon found most?**

At the international level, school drop-out is mostly found in countries of the South. According to the statistics reported in The Progress of Nations (1993), 96 per cent of children living in industrialized countries reach primary grade V and the regional average is dramatically reduced in Sub-Saharan Africa (48 per cent), South America (48 per cent), South Asia (50 per cent), Middle East and North Africa (81 per cent), and East Asia and the Pacific (83 per cent). Although the MENA region retains a relatively high proportion (81 per cent) of its initial intake (89 per cent entering grade I), there is still a lot to do to reach the ideal of universal primary education -- namely, 95+ per cent enrollment and 100 per cent retention among boys and girls in both the urban and rural areas.

At the national level, drop-out occurs predominantly in rural areas where poverty prevails. School drop-out increases during the harvest season when the rural family needs the labor of the child in the field. Drop-out is usually higher among girls, although this is not true in every country. Female drop-out, accompanied by low female enrollment in general, leads to higher female illiteracy rates and a shortage of female teachers and educated role models especially in rural communities. This, in turn, may lead to increased female drop-out from schools. The three factors: living in rural areas,

poverty and being female, have turned out to be the determining causes for drop-out in many countries.

3) **When does drop-out usually occur?**

The early grades of primary school usually witness a higher rate of drop-out. Research has pointed to the fact that the "war on drop-out" will be lost or won in the lower grades, especially the first (UNESCO 1984). However, this cannot be said of both sexes and in all countries given the variation that exists between and within nations. In many regions of the world, the girl child is pulled out of school when she is believed to be physically mature and thus unable to attend school along with boys of her own age or older. In other cases, she is considered to be ready for marriage and is withdrawn from school in order to start preparing her for "real" life while school is often considered irrelevant. In the above cases, school drop-out, especially among girls, occurs at grade IV or V. It can be said that drop-out at the primary level is more dangerous due to the possibility of a return to illiteracy before the acquisition and retention of basic academic skills.

4) **Who is most likely to become a drop-out?**

A drop-out is usually, but not always, a repeater first. There is a close relationship between repetition and drop-out (UNICEF / IBE 1995); they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. A child who repeats the same grade may eventually drop out of school for a variety of reasons, such as embarrassment for being over-age compared to others in the class and the internalization of failure. One of the indications that drop outs are usually repeaters is their being over age for the grade they had failed to complete.

Although drop-out and repetition tend to be closely related, research has pointed to significant differences in the underlying causes of each. According to a UNESCO study (1980), drop-out is closely related to external factors, repetition is associated more with elements internal to the system of education. "Internal" factors affecting drop-out include educational facilities,

teaching methods, curricular content, teacher training, school administration, examinations and the overall teaching-learning experience. "External" factors, on the other hand, refer to those elements that lie outside the school, including the child's social, economic and cultural milieu. As research points to the influence of in-school factors on the occurrence of repetition, and as repetition is likely to lead to eventual drop-out, it seems only logical to improve the educational system and thus prevent drop-out -- especially given the difficulty of intervening in what occurs outside the classroom.

5) **What is the status of primary education in the MENA region?**

Primary education means different things for different systems of education in the region. One of the important differences is the number of years and grades allocated to primary schooling. According to the information provided by UNESCO (1993), Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates regard the first six grades of school, from age 6 to 11, as primary school. On the other hand, Kuwait regards primary education as four years of schooling, from age 6 to 9, while in Jordan education at the first level takes place over 10 years, from age 6 to 15. Lebanon and Egypt consider primary school as a five-year cycle, which takes place between ages 6-10. Morocco and Sudan begin primary education at age 7 and continue it for a period of 6 years. Former Democratic Yemen considered primary school as 8 years of education, from ages 7 to 14, while education at the first level begins at age 6 and lasts for a period of 6 years in the former Yemen Arab Republic. In Libya, primary education is 9 years long, from ages 6 to 14.

The study of primary education in the MENA countries points to significant variation between countries and considerable gender disparity within them. Before assessing the extent of the drop-out problem in MENA, it would be useful to have a clearer look at the key primary education indicators in the region.

a) **Enrollment Rate**

MENA countries differ considerably in their primary gross enrollment rates (GER). Tunisia leads the way with a total GER of 116 per cent, while Djibouti lags behind with a 39 per cent GER rate. When the net enrollment rate (NER) is taken into consideration, the United Arab Emirates and Syria rank first, with 100 and 97 per cent total NER respectively, with Djibouti still behind, with a rate of only 37 per cent, (UNICEF - MENARO 1995). A complete overview of the region is provided in Tables 1 and 2 in which the countries are rank ordered according to their total GERs and NERs. Gender differences are indicated in both tables, yet, due to lack of disaggregated data by sector, it is not possible to illustrate the urban/rural differences in enrollment rates.

As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, the rank order of countries varies depending on whether they are placed according to their GERs or NERs. While Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Lebanon and Libya are the first five leading countries in the MENA region, based on their total GERs, Jordan and Qatar enter the picture once NERs are considered, with Libya leaving it.

Primary education indicators point to the inability of most MENA countries to absorb their school-age population (see Figure 1). UNICEF - MENARO (1995) figures show a dramatic difference among countries as far as the percentage of school-age children left out of the educational system is concerned. Whereas Djibouti has a disturbing 63 per cent of children unreached, the percentage is zero for the United Arab Emirates, followed by Syria (3 per cent), Lebanon and Iran (4 per cent), etc.

Table 1

Primary Education Gross Enrollment Rate by Gender in MENA

Gross Enrollment Rate

Country	T	M	F
Tunisia	116	123	109
UAE	111	111	111
Iran	111	117	105
Lebanon	109	110	107
Libya	109	112	105
Iraq	106	115	98
Bahrain	102	102	102
Oman	102	106	97
Kuwait	100	101	99
Qatar	99	103	95
Syria	99	99	99
Jordan	98	98	99
Algeria	95	103	88
Egypt	95	96	95
Morocco	83	92	73
Yemen	81	110	52
Saudi Arabia	76	82	70
Sudan	75	82	68
Djibouti	47	55	39
West Bank/Gaza	-	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

Table 2

Primary Education Net Enrollment Rate by Gender in MENA

Net Enrollment Rate

Country	T	M	F
UAE	100	100	100
Syria	97	100	95
Iran	96	99	93
Lebanon	96	97	95
Jordan	93	90	92
Qatar	93	94	91
Bahrain	92	91	92
Algeria	87	94	80
Tunisia	86	90	83
Egypt	85	-	-
Iraq	85	95	80
Kuwait	85	84	86
Oman	84	86	81
Libya	76	80	72
Saudi Arabia	62	68	56
Sudan	53	57	50
Morocco	52	61	44
Yemen	47	60	34
Djibouti	37	43	31
West Bank/Gaza	-	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

b) Gender Disparity

What does the above information tell us about the extent of female enrollment and the magnitude of primary level gender disparities in the region?

The order of countries on the basis of total enrollment rate changes once female enrollment is taken into account.(see Table 3). It should be noted that the rank order is based on female GERs only, because of incomplete gender disaggregated data on NERs. Statistics show that the United Arab Emirates, Tunisia, Lebanon, Iran and Libya lead the way in female enrollments while Morocco, Saudi Arabia,
Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti are at the bottom of the list.

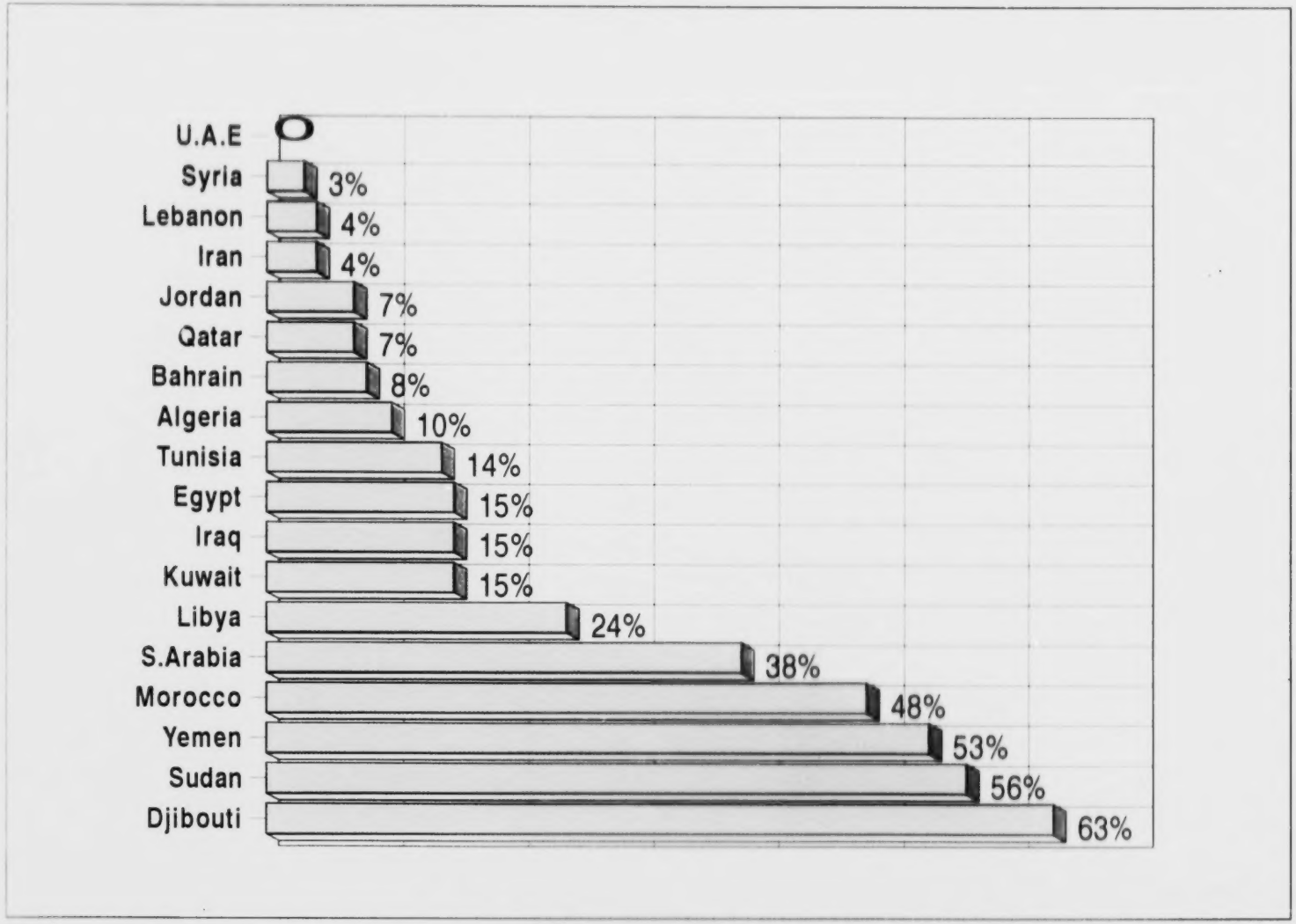
Based on female NERs in the region, no school-age girls are left out of the primary education system in the United Arab Emirates, while 69 per cent of girls in Djibouti are not enrolled. Figure 2 shows that the percentage of unreached females is less than 10 per cent in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Bahrain, Jordan and Qatar, and gradually rising in Kuwait, Tunisia, Iraq, Algeria and Libya, etc. The proportion of unreached females reaches an alarming level in Yemen (66 per cent) and Djibouti (69 per cent).

A comparative study of male and female enrollment in the region points to gender disparity at the primary education level. Exceptions are Jordan and Kuwait where there is a 2 per cent male-female disparities due to the fact that female NERs are higher than male NERs in both countries. Jordan has a 92 per cent female enrollment rate, compared to a 90 per cent male enrollment rate. Kuwait has an 86 per cent female, compared to an 84 per cent male, NER rate. According to Figure 3, there is no gender disparity in the primary educational systems in the United Arab Emirates. Male-female differences range from 1 per cent in Bahrain to 17 per cent in Morocco.

There is a surprising 15 per cent disparity in Iraq despite efforts being made to eliminate the primary gender gap there.

PRIMARY EDUCATION INDICATORS-MENA REGION

% Of School-Age Children Left Out Of The Educational System



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PRIMARY EDUCATION INDICATORS-MENA REGION

% Of School-Age Female Left Out Of The Educational System

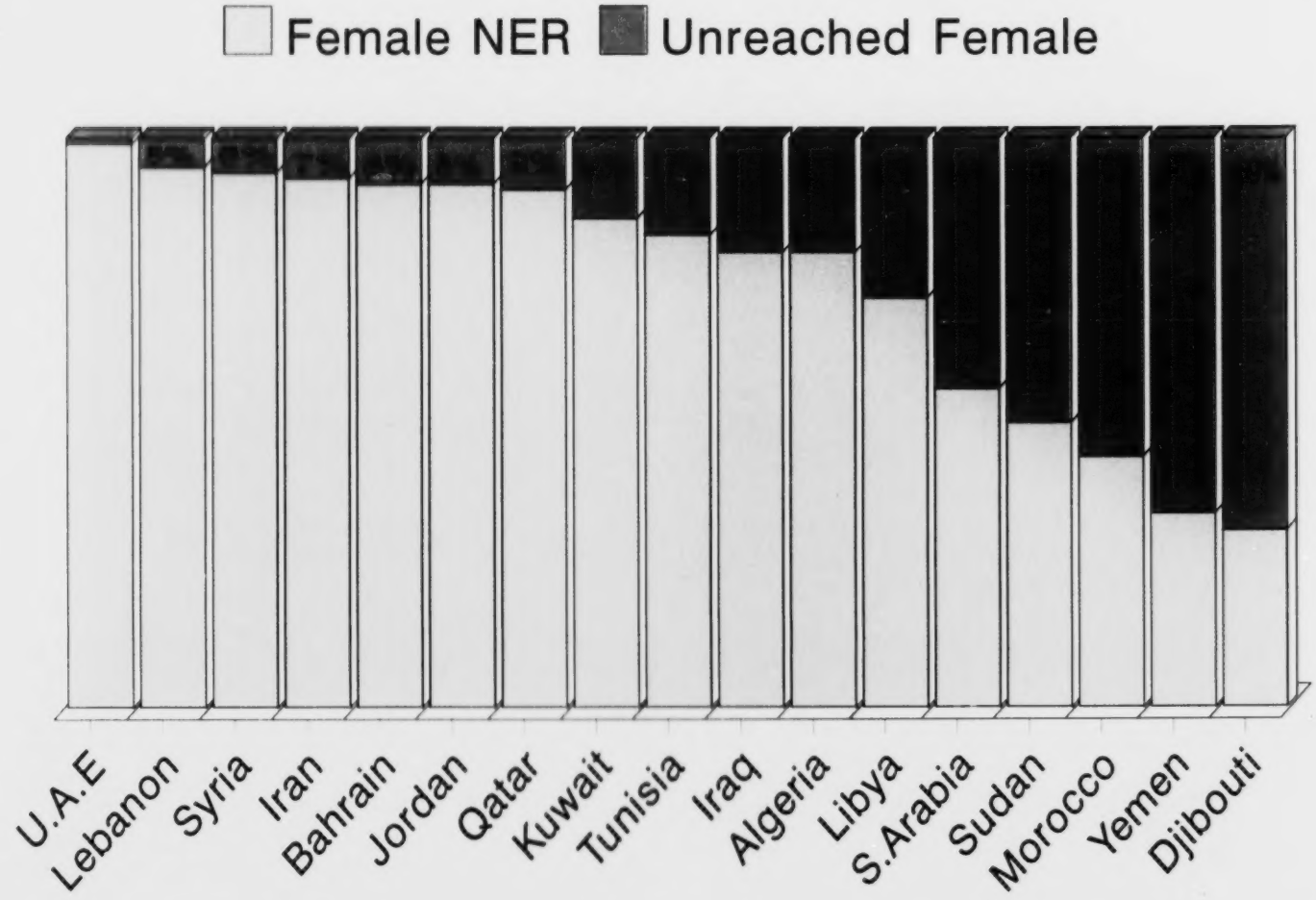

Figure 2

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Table 3

Primary Education Female Enrollment Rates in the MENA Region

Female Enrollment Rate

Country	Gross	Net
U A E	111	100
Tunisia	109	83
Lebanon	107	95
Iran	105	93
Libya	105	72
Bahrain	102	92
Jordan	99	92
Kuwait	99	86
Syria	99	94
Iraq	98	80
Oman	97	81
Qatar	95	91
Egypt	95	-
Algeria	88	80
Morocco	73	44
Saudi Arabia	70	56
Sudan	68	50
Yemen	52	34
Djibouti	39	31
West Bank/Gaza	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

The status of education in the MENA region, as portrayed in the above tables and graphs, points to an unpleasant reality: a considerable number of children in the region remain out-of-school, most of them girls. School-age children are usually left out of the educational system for two reasons: either they have never had the chance to attend school, or they have left it after having been enrolled. The underlying cause of school non-attendance is usually found in the socio-economic and cultural milieu in which unreached children live, although such factors as lack of school buildings, distance from home, lack of co-educational classrooms and the absence of female teachers also play a crucial role in the decision made by the family not to send their children to school. Whatever the cause of leaving school after having enrolled may be, repetition and drop-out are a good index of wastage, the topic of the next section.

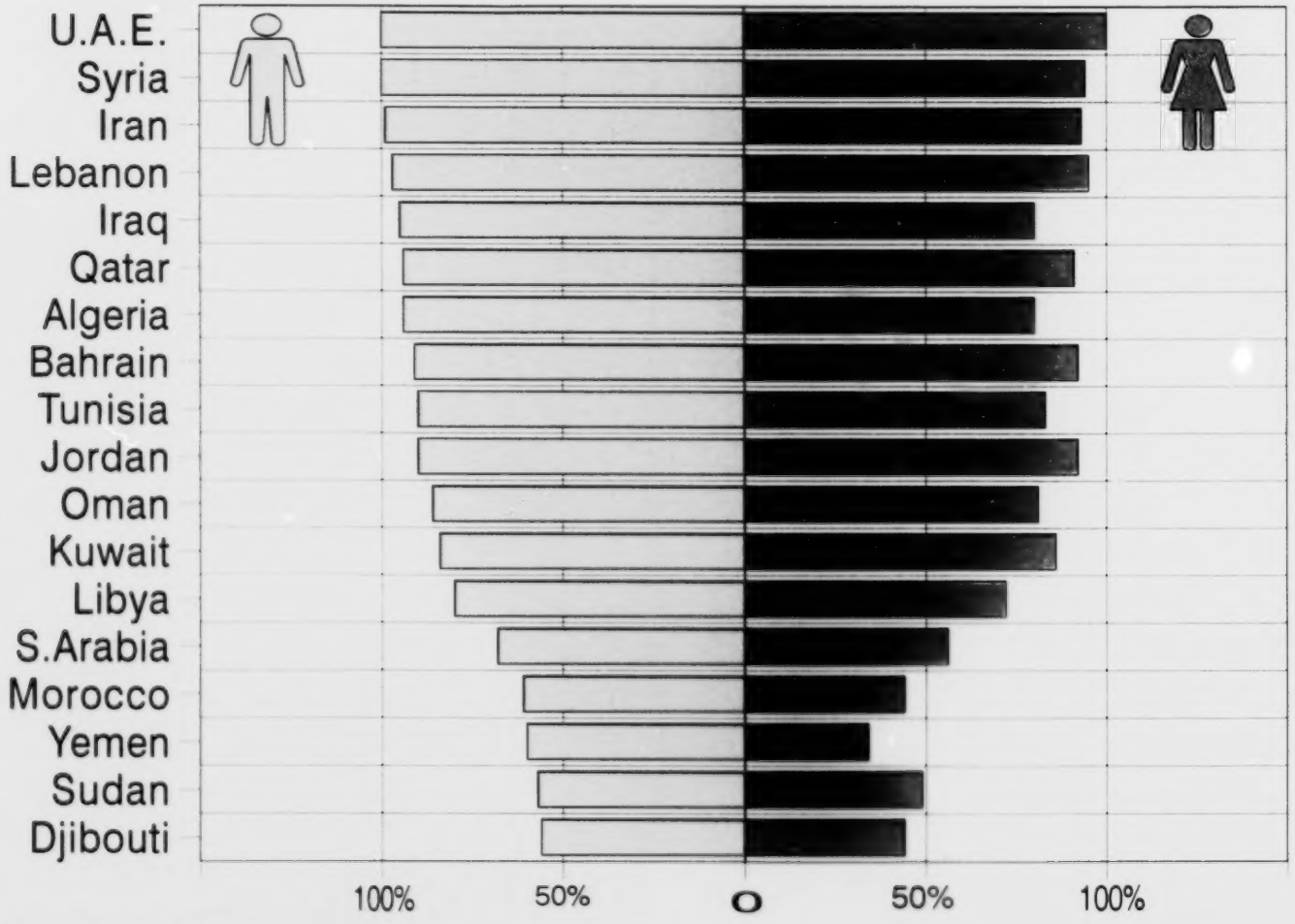
6) <u>How serious is the repetition and drop-out problem in the MENA region?</u>

The answer is, quite serious. The educational systems of MENA countries continue to suffer from drop-out and repetition despite a political commitment to implement primary education, improve enrollment rates and increase resource allocation to education in the form of government expenditure, schools, teachers and curricular materials. Quantitatively speaking, the MENA region has taken education seriously, though there may be still a lot to be said about the quality of education offered in the majority of countries. Why is it then that school wastage continues to threaten the educational systems of MENA?

One of the leading causes may be the over-rapid expansion of primary schooling in the region. The irony of quantitative expansion of education has been an increase in wastage rates, especially once enrollment increases up to and beyond 70 per cent of the age cohort. According to an early UNESCO study (1967) conducted in Asia, it was reported that wastage increases when expanded educational systems begin to draw on an increasing number of children from the "vulnerable sections" of society. "When enrollment is low, many students come from middle and upper class families who will be motivated to keep their children in school, and the drop-out rate will be low.

PRIMARY EDUCATION INDICATORS - MENA REGION

Net Enrolment Ratio by Gender



Sources: UNESCO 1993, UNICEF 1993-94
B.Shakoori,UNICEF

Higher enrollment figures include children from the lower social strata, disadvantaged groups, and girls. These children are socially or economically disadvantaged and the motivation of their families will be lower than that of the more economically well-off groups. This will lead to higher drop-out rates". (UNESCO 1984). To assess whether the above statement is true in MENA needs further exploration, and it may provide food for thought once the underlying causes of school wastage are uncovered.

a) Repetition

UNESCO (1993) statistics point to a relatively high repetition rate for Arab states, with a general decline since the 1970s. Table 4 shows primary school repetition rates in 19 Arab states from 1975 to 1990. The rank order of the countries is done on the basis of the percentage of repeaters in 1990. The available statistics show Tunisia, Iraq, Mauritania, Djibouti and Morocco as suffering from the highest repetition rates, with the rest of the Arab states faring better with a repeater percentage of less than 10. Algeria, Djibouti, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have experienced a decline in repetition rates since 1975.

UNICEF - MENARO (1995) figures also show Yemen, Tunisia, Iraq and Djibouti as the leading countries in terms of repetition rates (see Table 5). What is noteworthy is the lower rate of repetition among girls in countries that have gender disaggregated data on repeaters. The male-female disparity can be observed in Table 6. The reason may be that girls are more successful in completing the grade they are enrolled in. It is more likely, however, that girls who fail a grade are pulled out of school and thus become drop-outs, while boys are allowed to repeat the grade. Higher drop-out rates among girls in the MENA region may prove the above statement true.

Table 4

Primary Education Repetition Rates in the Arab States 1975-1990

Percentage of Repeaters

Country	1975	1980	1985	1990
Tunisia	19	21	20	20
Iraq	-	-	21	19
Mauritania	15	14	18	17
Djibouti	19	-	12	13
Morocco	28	29	20	11
Algeria	13	12	8	9
Oman	9	12	12	9
Saudi Arabia	15	16	12	9
Egypt	7	8	2	8
Qatar	22	13	11	7
Syria	10	8	7	7
U A E	15	9	8	6
Bahrain	-	11	9	5
Jordan	4	3	6	5
Kuwait	11	6	5	3
Malta	1	2	3	1
Libya	16	9	-	-
Sudan*	-	-	-	-
Yemen	-	25	-	-

Source: UNESCO 1993

* Sudan practices the policy of automatic promotion.

Table 5

Primary Education Repetition Rates in the MENA Region

Country	Percentage of Repeaters
Yemen	25
Tunisia	20
Iraq	19
Djibouti	14
Lebanon	13
Morocco	12
Oman	11
Algeria	9
Iran	9
Egypt	8
Saudi Arabia	7
Syria	7
Qatar	7
Bahrain	5
Jordan	5
U A E	4
Kuwait	3
Libya	-
Sudan	-
West Bank/Gaza	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

Table 6

Primary Education Repetition Rates by Gender in Selected MENA Countries

Percentage of Repeaters

Country	T	M	F
Tunisia	19	20	17
Morocco	15	17	15
Lebanon	13	15	10
Iran	9	10	7
Syria	8	9	7

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

b) Drop-Out

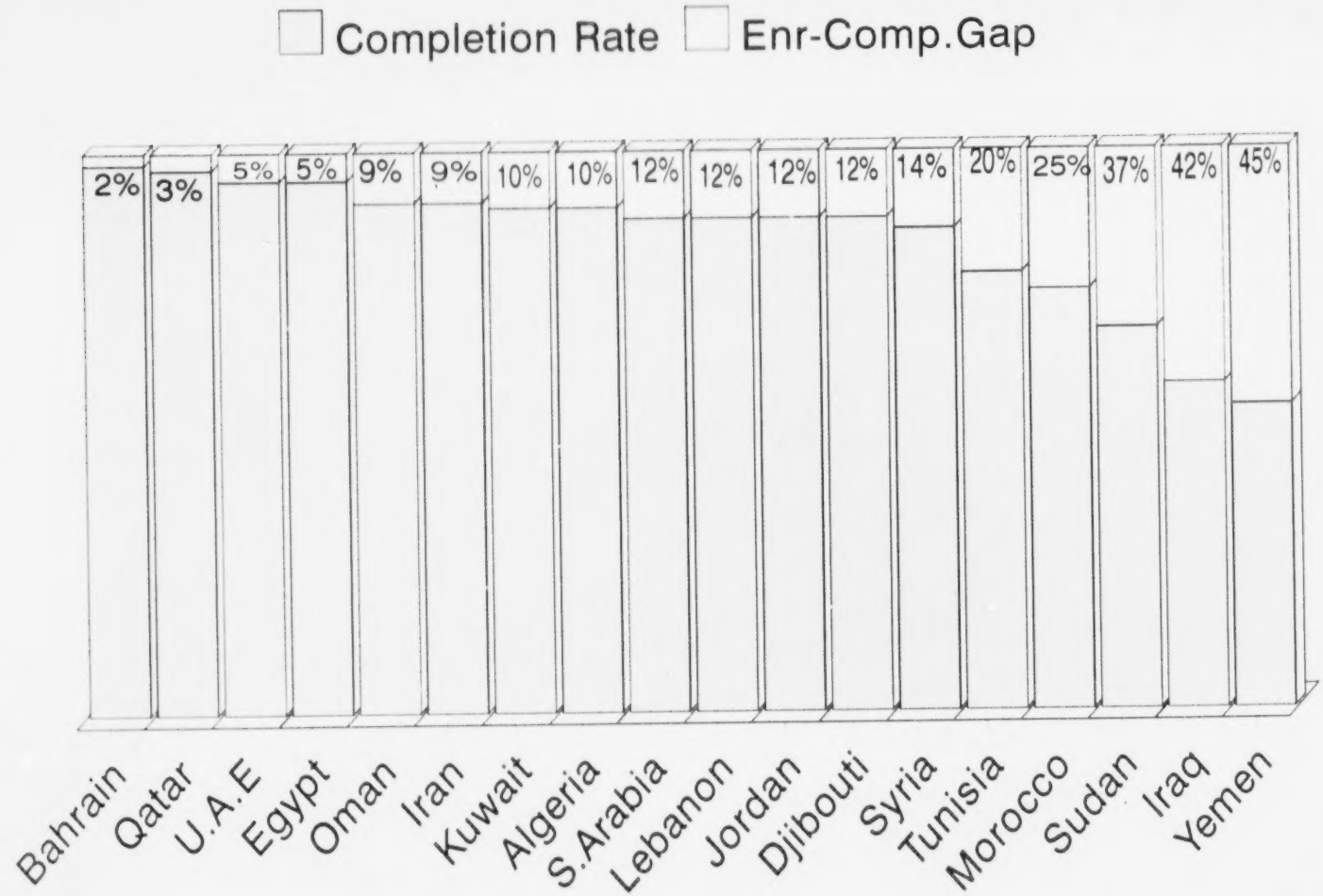
As discussed earlier in this paper, repetition does not necessarily lead to drop-out, yet it may in the long run. Drop-out is a major source of wastage and may "crudely" be calculated by comparing the gap between initial enrollment and final completion rates at each level and for each grade. Primary education indicators provided by UNICEF point to a regional variation in MENA. Figure 4 shows that Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iran and Kuwait lead the way in their primary school completion rates, with a less than 10 per cent enrollment-completion gap. Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, Djibouti, Syria and Morocco have a gap of 10 to 20 per cent, with much higher rates for Tunisia (22 per cent) and Sudan (37 per cent). The school's holding power is lowest in Iraq and Yemen in which 42 per cent of Iraqi and almost half (45 per cent) of Yemeni primary school children are not able to complete the grade they originally enrolled in. The above enrollment-completion gap indicates serious educational inefficiencies and high rates of wastage; this should be a real cause for concern among educational planners and policy makers.

A more detailed picture of non-completion rates by grade and gender is provided by UNICEF. Estimated drop-out rates by grade IV in the MENA region are available through UNICEF - MENARO (1995) statistics. Table 7 ranks MENA countries on the basis of total percentage of grade IV drop-out rates. The figures are alarming given the educational reality that fourth grade drop-outs are unlikely to have acquired sufficient competencies to stay literate. That means that today's drop-outs would soon swell the rank of the illiterates in the region. According to the statistics provided in Table 7, drop-out rates range between 1 per cent in Bahrain and Qatar and an alarming 32 per cent in Saudi Arabia. Drop-out is high in Egypt (25 per cent), Yemen (20 per cent), Iraq (12 per cent) and Kuwait (10 per cent). There is also gender disparity in drop-out rates in the region, with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco and United Arab Emirates showing higher drop-out among females, while male-female rates are equal in Tunisia, Syria and Bahrain. A

few countries, including Lebanon and Qatar, show lower female drop-out rates; in fact, no female drop-outs are reported in Qatar.

Fewer female than male students complete grade IV in Oman, Algeria, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq and Yemen (see Table 8). In the other MENA countries, the rates are either on par (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait) or higher, as in the case of Qatar, Morocco and Sudan. As far as final grade completion rates are concerned, gender disparity is highest in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, with lower female than male completion rates (see Table 9). Meanwhile the female final grade completion rate is higher in Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar and Sudan.

Gap Between Enrolment And Completion



SOURCE UNESCO 1993,UNICEF 1994
Shakoori,UNICEF

Table 7

Primary Education Drop-Out Rates by Grade IV

Percentage of Drop-Out

Country	T	M	F
Saudi Arabia	32	-	-
Egypt	25	-	-
Yemen	20	17	28
Iraq	13	9	17
Lebanon	12	13	12
Kuwait	10	-	-
Djibouti	8	-	-
Jordan	8	-	-
Algeria	7	6	9
Tunisia	6	6	6
Morocco	5	4	5
Iran	3	-	-
Syria	3	3	3
U A E	3	3	4
Bahrain	1	1	1
Qatar	1	2	0
Libya	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-
Sudan	-	-	-
West Bank/Gaza	-	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1994

Table 8

Grade IV Completion Rates in MENA

Country	T	M	F
Egypt	100	-	-
Bahrain	99	99	99
Qatar	99	98	100
Oman	98	98	97
Algeria	97	98	96
Saudi Arabia	97	97	97
U A E	96	97	96
Iran	93	94	93
Tunisia	93	94	92
Djibouti	92	-	-
Jordan	92	-	-
Lebanon	91	91	91
Kuwait	90	90	90
Syria	84	84	83
Iraq	83	89	76
Morocco	-	82	85
Yemen	80	83	72
Sudan	72	70	74
Libya	-	-	-
West Bank/Gaza	-	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

Table 9

Primary Education Final Grade Completion Rates in MENA

Country	T	M	F
Bahrain	97	98	96
Qatar	97	94	99
Egypt	95	-	-
U A E	94	94	94
Iran	91	92	90
Oman	91	93	88
Kuwait	90	90	90
Algeria	89	90	88
Djibouti	88	-	-
Lebanon	88	87	88
Saudi Arabia	88	87	89
Jordan	87	84	91
Syria	85	90	81
Morocco	80	83	87
Tunisia	78	79	77
Sudan	64	60	67
Iraq	58	67	49
Yemen	54	62	47
Libya	-	-	-
West Bank/Gaza		-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

The analysis of available statistics indicates that grade entry as they go up the gender scale is more difficult for girls, once they have enrolled they have an equal chance of completing that grade.

This is not true for Iraqi and Yemeni girls whose completion rate for grade IV and the final grade lags far behind that of boys. The inability of a large proportion of both Iraqi boys and girls who have survived grade IV to successfully complete the final grade is also alarming. As illustrated in Tables 8 and 9, the total grade IV completion rate in Iraq is 83 per cent, compared to only 58 per cent completion rate in the final grade. The gap is also wide in Yemen where 80 per cent total completion rate in grade IV drops to 54 per cent for the final grade completion rate. Although the drop-out from grade IV to the final grade exists for both male and female students, drop-out is higher for Iraqi and Yemeni girls (27 and 25 per cent, respectively), compared to that of boys (22 and 21 per cent, respectively). Generally, more girls than boys drop-out between grade IV and the final grade of primary school in Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, while completion rates are more favorable for girls in Lebanon, Qatar, Sudan and United Arab Emirates. An analysis of the causes of male-female disparity in each country may shed light on the in-school as well as out-of-school factors that lead to the existing drop-out gender gap in the region.

c) **Survival Rates at the Primary Level**

The holding power of the school can be assessed accurately if one takes into account survival rates in primary education. Numbers of pupils reaching each grade in the Arab states are illustrated in Table 10 in which the evolution of a cohort of 1,000 pupils starting primary school, is calculated. Countries listed in Table 10 appear in alphabetical order and they include 16 out of 20 MENA countries. An analysis of the statistics provided by UNESCO points to an interesting pattern.

In most Arab states, the drop-out problem begins to reveal itself early in the primary education cycle. In fact, drop-out is quite evident in the transition from the first to the second grade. In Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, not all students who have completed grade I are able to enter grade II.

The above pattern is less true in Algeria and Egypt, where drop-out begins at the transition from grade II to III. The primary education system in Qatar begins to lose its children when they move from grade III to IV. Bahrain fares best among Arab states in that the number of pupils remains intact from the first to the fifth grade and drop-out occurs at the transition point from grade V to VI.

An interesting pattern exists in Syria and Tunisia where male and female students drop out at different stages. In Syria, total drop-out occurs at grades II to III; girls drop out at the beginning of grade II. Male pupils, on the other hand, begin dropping out at the transition from grade IV to V. Such gender gaps in completion rates at differing stages occur in Tunisia too. Tunisian boys drop out first in grade IV, while girl drop-out begins as early as grade II.

Table 10

Evolution of a Cohort of 1000 Pupils Starting Primary School in the Arab States

Number of Pupils ..... Reaching Grade :

Country	Starting Year	Sex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Algeria	1989	MF	1000	1000	991	974	945	904			
		F	1000	1000	987	964	928	881			
		M	1000	1000	992	980	956	924			
Bahrain	1989	MF	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	921			
		F	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	924			
		M	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	919			
Djibouti	1974	MF	1000	960	712	706	706	705			
Egypt	1985	MF	1000	1000	991	988	973	953			
Iraq	1987	MF	1000	953	898	827	721	580			
		F	1000	930	858	761	634	485			
		M	1000	974	935	890	805	674			
Jordan	1989	MF	1000	994	990	985	980	974	970	930	845
		F	1000	994	990	985	979	974	969	937	914
		M	1000	994	990	985	980	974	963	914	870
Kuwait	1985	MF	1000	969	935	903					
		F	1000	967	934	902					
		M	1000	971	935	903					
Libya	1975	MF	1000	946	941	918	893	830			
		F	1000	942	927	895	852	770			
		M	1000	947	947	934	927	883			

Table 10 Continued:

Country	Starting Year	Sex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Morocco	1990	MF	1000	922	874	817	749	681				
		F	1000	915	865	815	757	692				
		M	1000	927	877	817	745	672				
Oman	1988	MF	1000	989	984	977	945	909				
		F	1000	990	984	970	928	884				
		M	1000	986	983	983	961	932				
Qatar	1989	MF	1000	1000	1000	989	986	970				
		F	1000	1000	1000	998	998	986				
		M	1000	1000	1000	979	960	943				
Saudi Arabia	1985	MF	1000	971	955	945	935	904				
		F	1000	971	960	960	957	938				
		M	1000	969	947	924	908	868				
Sudan	1984	1000	919	870	819	776	764					
		1000	921	884	843	808	808					
		1000	917	860	802	753	726					
Syria	1989	MF	1000	1000	992	992	972	939				
		F	1000	994	976	972	949	910				
		M	1000	1000	1000	1000	984	956				
Tunisia	1990	MF	1000	986	963	922	868	765				
		F	1000	948	891	855	776	701				
		M	1000	1000	1000	954	920	797				
U A E	1989	MF	1000	976	970	966	957	940				
		F	1000	974	966	961	954	948				
		M	1000	979	978	974	964	935				

Source: UNESCO 1993

In certain Arab states, girls drop out at a higher rate than boys. This is true for Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Yet girls tend to remain in primary school in higher numbers than boys in varying grades in Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan. Girls' higher persistency rates in the latter may be due to their higher performance and achievement in school. It may also be due to family pressure which demands that a son's help be given in agricultural tasks or as an extra source of income, both factors leading to the pulling out of boys at an earlier age, compared to girls.

According to UNESCO (1993) statistics on Arab states, the survival rates for girls reaching sixth grade are highest in Qatar, where 986 out of a cohort of 1,000 girls entering grade I reached grade VI. In Jordan it (974), in the United Arab Emirates (971), in Saudi Arabia (938), in Bahrain (924), in Syria (910), in Kuwait (902), in Oman (884), in Algeria (881), in Sudan (808), in Libya (770), in Tunisia (701), in Morocco (692) and, last, in Iraq (485).

A unique pattern of female persistence and drop-out emerges in Arab states for which gender disaggregated survival rates are available. In Algeria, the female-enrollment persistence rate begins to decrease gradually from grade III to VI. Gradual decrease is also registered in Syria, beginning with grade II and peaking at grade VI. Persistence rates are progressively lower in Iraq as grades go up, such that less than half of the girls enrolled in grade I reach grade VI. Jordan experiences minimum female drop-out until grade VII with a gradual decrease in the ninth and tenth grade. Female survival rates remain constant for Kuwait during the primary cycle. In Qatar, the entire female cohort remains intact until grade IV, after which there is minimal drop-out until the end of the primary cycle.

The case of Bahrain is noteworthy in that the entire female student group survives from grade I to V with a sudden decrease when they reach grade VI. Physical maturity and/or the possibility of marriage may be the cause. This is, however, not the rule in the region. Libya has a higher drop-out rate in the transition from the first to the second grade compared to grades III, IV and V, with a final high when girls reach the sixth grade. The same pattern occurs in Morocco, Oman and Saudi Arabia, while Tunisia has an erratic pattern with no clear trend.

There is also another kind of pattern in Sudan and the United Arab Emirates. Female pupils going to school in these two countries experience the highest drop-out rates moving from grade I to II with a gradual decrease as the grades go up. In fact, drop-out stops when girls reach the final grade of primary school in Sudan. The situation in the latter seems to suggest that the primary education system selects its "success" cases early in the cycle and filters the rest out to push them out, so that the ones who survive the first transition remain the survivors. An in-depth study of what occurs in the first grade may determine whether the "selection" process is performed by the teacher through preferential treatment of those who are "destined" to succeed-- hidden curriculum messages that begin a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. Further research may point to the fact that families assess the relevance and utility of education for their girls during the first year of school, so that girls who successfully complete grade I are kept in school until the end, while those who fail are immediately pulled out without a chance of repeating. Studies of the above kind may provide more detailed and insightful information if they utilize qualitative, participatory research methods that use interview and observation as their major source of data.

d) **Transition from Primary to Secondary Level Education**

Yet another indicator of how many children are lost to the schooling system is the transition rate from the first to the second levels of education in each country. The previous sections illustrated drop-out by grade IV at the primary level, along with fourth and final grade completion rates. The danger of school non-completion at the basic education level as has been mentioned is a relapse to illiteracy in the future. There is evidence to suggest that fourth grade completion will lead to the retention of basic literacy skills throughout adult life. That may be why government, non-governmental and voluntary organizations at the national as well as international levels are aiming at first implementing universal primary education (UPE) which is also a basic human right as well as a contributing factor to the development of the individual and the society in which he/she lives. Based on the above reasoning, educational systems worldwide are attempting to provide primary education for the entire school-age population in order to reach the decade as well as mid-decade goals which were set by various international and donor agencies who signed the Jomtien Declaration, World Children's Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Field research in one of the countries in the MENA region (Iran)*[1], has questioned the exclusive interest paid to primary education as an end in itself. In extensive open-ended interviews with rural families in Iran, researchers were told that one of the major reasons families do not send their daughters to school or pull them out early is that they believe primary school "is not leading anywhere". Parents often question

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[1]* UNICEF-Tehran and Ministry of Education (1994-1995) Joint research project on the status of girls' drop-out from primary education in Iran

the advantage of sending their girls to elementary school for two reasons: its real or perceived irrelevance to real life and the "dead-end" after the completion of the primary cycle. Formal education, according to rural parents, should act as a key for social mobility. "If that avenue is closed, what is the use of sending our daughter to school?" is a question raised by many parents. That "avenue", for the most part, is the ability to continue the educational process to the next secondary level.

Yet UNICEF-MENARO (1995) statistics show that not all primary school graduates in the MENA region enter secondary education. Table 11 illustrates the rate of transition from the first to the second level of education in MENA countries. As with most other education indicators, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Jordan lead the way with a higher than 90 per cent total transition rate. Iraq, Syria, Qatar, Algeria and Morocco follow with an 80 per cent or more total transition rate. The rate is lower for Turkey, Kuwait and Lebanon despite the relatively high rates of primary school enrollment in all three countries. Slightly more than half of the primary school graduates enter the secondary level in Tunisia (58 per cent) and in Sudan only (57 per cent). Less than one-third of the girls and boys completing the elementary cycle can hope to enter the next level in Djibouti (27 per cent).

Few MENA countries have provided transition rates by gender. Among those that have, the female transition rate from the first to the second level of education is highest in Iran (92 per cent), followed by Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan, Lebanon and Tunisia, (see Table 11). The male transition rate is higher in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, with higher female rates in Syria, Algeria, Sudan and Tunisia. Male and female rates are equal in Morocco. It would also be interesting to obtain the transition rate from secondary school to the third level of education in

the MENA region. A study, by gender and sector, of a cohort of 1,000 pupils starting primary school and completing higher education may begin to answer many of the questions raised regarding the real function of formal education and its role in social mobility.

The last question raised in this section is whether international organizations and donor agencies are in some ways unwittingly contributing to maintaining the present level of unreached pupils precisely because they favour a policy of focusing on primary education at the expense of secondary education. They may be reducing the educational opportunities of a child living in the MENA region if, as discussed earlier, his/her elders believe that primary school will lead to a dead end in the absence of a chance of further studies. By concentrating on primary education and focusing on pre-set goals as the desired product, instead of on the learning process as a whole, international agencies may well render a disservice to the very people they are striving so hard to help.

Table 11

Transition from the First to the Second Level of Education in the MENA Region

Country	T	M	F
Bahrain	95	-	-
U A E	94	-	-
Iran	92	93	92
Jordan	91		
Iraq	89	94	82
Syria	88	87	89
Qatar	84	-	-
Algeria	81	79	82
Morocco	80	80	80
Kuwait	70	-	-
Lebanon	66	71	60
Tunisia	58	57	58
Sudan	57	52	64
Djibouti	27	-	-
Egypt	-	-	-
Libya	-	-	-
Oman	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-
West Bank/Gaza	-	-	-
Yemen	-	-	-

Source: UNICEF - MENARO 1995

III. ANALYSIS OF THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN THE MENA REGION

In this section, the underlying causes of the drop-out problem in primary school will be discussed with special reference to the factors leading to girls' drop-out. Hindering factors in the MENA region have been identified, based on the information provided by UNICEF country offices in the region. The documents provided range from statistics to educational analyses and field surveys of the status of girls' education in specific countries. As mentioned earlier, no information was received from Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In order to differentiate between the internal and external causes of non-completion at the primary level, causal factors have been classified into in-school and out-of-school phenomena. Given the inevitable and continual interaction between the two, in-school and out-of-school phenomena will be discussed together. The classification of internal and external causes of school drop-out into separate categories does not imply that their impact can be assessed or evaluated in isolation. Classification by categories only serves to facilitate identification, analysis and treatment. The school does not exist in isolation and educational values and priorities reflect the dominant values and priorities of society at large. Thus, school and society, and their role in keeping or not keeping children in the classroom are studied in relation to each other.

1. Factors Affecting School Drop-Out

A review of the literature (Bach 1985; Caillods and Postlethwaite 1989; Cohn and Rossmiller 1987; Davico 1990; Fuller 1994; Halpern 1986; Lee and Lockheed 1990; Raudenbush 1991) on factors responsible for school effectiveness and drop-out leads one to identify several constraints. The priority given these factors and the degree to which they represent an obstacle to school completion depends on the structure of the society and its educational system. The "internal factors" have been posed as questions that need to be asked by anyone studying the drop-out problem. The answers to the eighty questions and the assessment of their impact on actual drop-out, can eventually lead to recommendations on eliminating drop-out.

a) **In-School Phenomena**

The extent to which a school is able to retain the entire student group originally enrolled in it depends to a large degree on the teaching-learning process that occurs in the educational setting. The first element is, therefore, the ***school*** itself. If one is to identify the causes of drop-out, one should address the following questions:

1. Is the school close to where the children live?
2. Are the school facilities (classrooms, library, laboratory) accessible and adequate?
3. Is the school co-educational?
4. Are latrines available in the school building or the vicinity?
5. How many children attend the same school?
6. Does the school operate on a shift-basis?
7. Does the school have a playground? Is the playground safe and fully equipped?
8. In the case of children living in time of war or unrest, is the school environment safe? Is it safe to attend school on a daily basis?
9. Does the school provide any health services?
10. When does the academic year begin and end?
11. Does the school provide food for its pupils?
12. Is schooling free of charge?
13. Does the school impose a uniform? If so, does it supply it?

In relation to the school, further questions may be asked about the ***classroom***:

1. What is the size of the classroom(s)?
2. Where are the classrooms located?
3. Do the classrooms have windows?
4. What do the classroom walls, floor and ceiling look like? What are the dimensions of each?
5. Are the classrooms used solely for teaching purposes?

6. Are the classrooms used as village storerooms?
7. How many grades are taught in the same classroom at the same time?
8. How is the classroom decorated?
9. What is the classroom equipment (desks, benches, chalkboards, maps, shelves, lighting)?
10. What is the seating arrangement in the classroom?

With regard to ***teachers***, one might ask:

1. How is the teacher recruited/trained and who recruits/trains teachers?
2. How old is the teacher?
3. How many grades and at what level does he/she teach?
4. What are the academic/professional credentials of the teacher?
5. How long has he/she been teaching?
6. Is he/she a native member of the community in which he/she teaches?
7. Does the teacher speak the same language as the pupils?
8. Does the teacher teach in the pupils' mother tongue?
9. Does the teacher like his/her work?
10. Why did he/she choose the teaching profession?
11. Is the teacher male or female?
12. Are the students male or female, or both?
13. Is the school close to where the teacher lives?
14. What are the teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-principal, teacher-parents relations like?
15. Is the teacher involved in community affairs?
16. What is the status of the teacher in the community in which he/she works?
17. How active is the teacher in the parent-teacher association, if any exists?
18. Is there any in-service training provided for teacher upgrading during the academic year?
19. What is the income level and economic status of the teacher?
20. Is teaching the only job the teacher holds or does he/she work elsewhere as well?

A series of questions pertain to the ***curriculum***, including:

1. What are the teaching/learning materials used in the school?
2. What is the role of the textbook?
3. Does the curriculum content include subjects related to the daily lives and needs of the children?
4. Are the textbooks core-curriculum-centered?
5. How are the textbooks written? Who writes them?
6. Are the textbooks prepared in accordance with the cognitive and affective development of the child?
7. What is the quality of the curriculum content?
8. Is there use of colour or pictures?
9. Are the textbooks distributed free of charge?
10. Can the pupils own the books?
11. Do the pupils share the same textbooks?
12. What is the language used in the books?
13. Is the curriculum content gender sensitive?
14. Did the teacher play a role in preparing the curriculum content?
15. Did the community participate in determining the content of the curriculum?
16. Do the children like the textbooks?
17. When do the children receive the textbooks during the academic year?

The teaching-learning process itself, including ***teaching methods*** and ***student achievement***, plays a major part in student retention. The answer to the following questions may shed light on its effect on drop-out:

1. What is the role of the teacher in the classroom?
2. What is the pupil/teacher ratio in each classroom?
3. Is there any delegation of responsibility to the learners?
4. How much discussion/questioning is allowed in the classroom?
5. How does the teacher treat students?
6. What is the teacher-learner relationship like, inside and outside the classroom?
7. Is there physical punishment inside or outside the classroom?
8. Is there any preferential treatment of "selected" students?

9. Is teaching limited to the official curriculum?
10. How much homework is assigned?
11. How does the teacher grade students?
12. What is the role of examinations? How often are exams administered?
13. Who prepares/corrects the exams?
14. Is automatic promotion practised at every level?
15. How is the student's failure in an examination treated by the teacher?
16. How is student absence or tardiness treated by the teacher?
17. What teaching methods does the teacher use?
18. Does the teaching method encourage individuality or does it promote cooperation?
19. Is there any learning by doing?
20. As far as the learner is concerned, does he/she enjoy school?

Last, but not least, ***extra-curricular activities*** can play an important role in student retention. The dominant tradition of schooling and the shortage of resources has led to the underestimation of the pivotal role of such activities in the child's desire to attend school."The school must be useful" is what the parents say, but as far as the children are concerned "it must also be fun". Given the limitations imposed by the structure of the schooling system and the content of the official curriculum, it is only through extra-curricular activities that learners may be exposed to group work, cooperation, participation, responsibility and accountability. The fun and enjoyment of out-of-class activities, be it sports, theater, school cleaning, work on the school farm or peer help, may very well work against the push-out influence of the classroom.

Factors internal to the educational system usually act as "push-out" factors (Dall 1983). As the name implies, these are the in-school phenomena that help push the student out of the school system after he/she has enrolled in it. What role such factors play in pushing out the students may very well be determined by their relationship to out-of-school phenomena, referred to as "pull-out" factors.

b) **Out-of-School Phenomena**

Out-of-school factors may be related to the pupil him/herself or to his/her family and community. School drop-out may be due to the physical health, diet or cognitive ability of the pupil. A hungry, malnourished, sick and overworked child is not able to concentrate in the classroom or study at home. An under-age child, whose birth certificate belongs to an older sibling who died before he/she was born cannot grasp the curriculum material intended for a school-age child. An exceptional pupil whose sensory impairment or mental retardation is not detected or addressed is unable to compete with others in the classroom. Such children will drop out of school due to factors beyond their control.

Also beyond the control of the child is the political milieu in which he/she lives. The instability, insecurity and anxiety brought about by war, political unrest, street fighting, armed conflict, forced migration and involuntary displacement, death or imprisonment of a loved one, or school closure in societies experiencing political upheaval have a direct impact on the child's academic performance. Thus Lebanese, Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Kurdish schoolchildren have not had or still do not have the same opportunity to complete school as their peer groups in other communities. The story of the MENA region is, for the most part, a story of the pain and human suffering brought about by man-made disasters; this aspect should not be forgotten when educational performance is being objectively evaluated in the region. In addition, children whose mother tongue is different from the official language of instruction have to be provided with some pre-school coaching before they can be expected to compete with the rest. Furthermore, a child who is expected to fail due to gender, place of residence or minority status cannot be expected to fare as well as one whose success is determined in advance.

Out-of-school phenomena also include geographical and climatic factors. Living in cold, mountainous, hard- to-reach places poses certain restrictions on school attendance, while life in arid lands with extremely hot temperatures has its own limitations. Imposing the same school calendar on children living in such different zones cannot but filter out those whose life-style does not fit the norm.

Yet additional determining factors in school enrollment are the prevailing cultural norms and values of the child's community. The low status accorded to education in certain illiterate communities, the real or perceived irrelevance of formal schooling to daily needs, the low importance attached to female education, and the absence of educated role models in various communities may lead to a situation where school completion is not deemed a priority. Once pulling children out of school is no longer considered wrong, its practice will prevail whenever the parents see fit. Parental or community lack of interest in education can become an even more serious impediment if education is not regarded as a political priority by a government that does not strictly impose compulsory education or allocate adequate budget for formal schooling.

The main cause of parental pull-out, however, remains poverty and the need for the child's labour in domestic and/or agricultural tasks. Families who live at the margin of society cannot afford even "free" education and those whose very survival depends on the toil of every single member of the family cannot afford to lose the help provided by the young. Since the victims of poverty cannot be blamed, it is up to the planners and policy-makers to facilitate education for the poor and the marginalized with the help and active participation of the disadvantaged groups themselves.

2. Reasons for Primary School Drop-Out in MENA

The questions raised here are as follows: To what extent do the internal and external factors referred to above actually act as hindering elements in school completion in the MENA region? Which of the above are especially important in the case of girls? A review of national reports on the status of girls' education submitted by the country offices in the MENA region and specific studies on their drop-out problem may shed light on this issue.

The MENA region confronts more or less the same problems as the rest of the developing world, with certain features specific to the political realities, socio-economic priorities and cultural values prevailing in the region. An attempt will be made here to provide an overall, macro view of the underlying causes of primary school drop-out in the

region as a whole. To obtain a more focused and detailed view of the causes, and in order to facilitate the introduction of action recommendations in the next section of the paper, the causes will be presented from a school-centered, family-centered and child-centered point of view.

The child him/herself has been included in this study in order to underline the much neglected psychological dimension of the drop-out experience. Since the victim of school drop-out has generally been ignored and rarely included as a source of information in drop-out studies (Syria, Tunisia and Iran are among the exceptions), there is a dearth of information within the child-centered approach. This dimension will nevertheless be presented in the present study in order to sensitize educational researchers and practitioners alike. The family-centered approach will include both the economic causes of drop-out and the family's socio-cultural values regarding education, especially for girls. The school-oriented approach will shed light on the in-school phenomena that lead to drop-out.

a) <u>School-Centered Reasons</u>

Hindering elements originating in the school usually act as factors that push the child out of the educational system. Though their hindering capacity may be strengthened when combined with forces acting outside of the educational system, school-centered elements are strong enough to cause early desertion on the part of the child. Forty hindering elements are classified here into four categories in order to facilitate their identification. They are then followed by references to the MENA countries in which such factors have been reported as causes of drop-out.

i) SCHOOL / CLASSROOM

- Long distance between school and home and lack of transportation between them (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Tunisia and Algeria)
- Dilapidated school buildings, absence of adequate school facilities and unpleasant/unclean school environment (Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Sudan)
- Poor management of multi-shift schools, overcrowded classrooms and high pupil/teacher ratio (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan)
- Cancellation of classes, especially in remote rural areas, when minimum enrollment requirements cannot be met (Iran)

- Lack of boarding schools or mobile tent schools for nomadic (Iran), and semi-homeless children (Jordan)
- Mismatch between school calendar and daily/seasonal life realities, especially among rural residents and nomads (Iran)
- Inability of the school to implement the compulsory education regulations (Iraq, Syria)
- Lack of follow-up on the part of the teacher on the absence or continuous tardiness of the student (Iran, Syria)
- Lack of accountability and early intervention on the part of the school (Iran, Iraq, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Sudan, Djibouti)
- Lack of school-parents communication and cooperation regarding educational issues and absence of parental participation in educational decision making (Iran, Iraq)
- Lack of advocacy and social mobilization on the part of the school regarding the benefits of education, especially for girls (Iran, Iraq, Sudan), and the school's inability to "convince" families to allow their daughters to stay in school once they have enrolled (Tunisia)
- Absence of upper elementary grades in remote villages, with a particularly negative effect on girls who are not allowed to continue their schooling away from home (Iran)
- Inability of the school to detect and address learning disabilities among children (Iran)
- Lack of special education programmes for slow learners or children with disabilities (West Bank / Gaza)
- Lack of sanitary services, water, electricity, and/or heating facilities at school (Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen)
- Lack of study centers in school coupled with limited space for study in overcrowded homes (true of all MENA countries)
- Lack of health units at school to prevent or treat illness among students (Iraq, Sudan)
- Absence of psychological services at school for children living in exceptionally difficult situations (Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, West Bank /

Gaza).

ii) **TEACHER / TEACHING METHODS**

- Inadequate pre-service and in-service training for teachers (Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan)
- Shortage of teachers (due to lack of necessary credentials or low turnover of teachers) (Lebanon, Sudan, West Bank / Gaza)
- Absence of qualified special education teachers (Egypt)
- Low quality of teaching, especially in rural areas (Tunisia)
- Frequent absence of rural teachers (Iran, Tunisia)
- Poor quality of teacher selection and training (Egypt)
- Use of non-native language speaking teachers among shcoolchildren whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction (Iran)
- Rigid and inflexible teaching methods (Iran, Sudan)
- Exclusive use of alienating, teacher-centered instructional methods that relegate the student to a passive position, emphasizing rote memorization and discipline (Lebanon, West Bank / Gaza)
- Avoiding learner-centered, participatory methods that encourage active learning, critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving abilities proven to be successful in bringing about effective learning (Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and West Bank/Gaza)
- Declining levels of motivation, morale, commitment and sense of responsibility among teachers due to economic, social and professional reasons (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon)
- Lack of a professional and psychological support system for rural teachers living in remote areas (Iran)

iii) **CURRICULUM / TEXTBOOKS**

- Irrelevance of the curriculum to the daily lives and needs of the pupil and his/her family (Egypt, Syria, West Bank/Gaza, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Djibouti, Sudan)
- Heavy and difficult curriculum content (Syria), especially for certain subjects such as history, mathematics, science and geography (Sudan)

- Absence of gender sensitivity in the curricular content and among the teaching personnel (Egypt)
- Early filtering out of "selected" students, especially girls, through messages transmitted by the hidden curriculum (Iran)
- Lack of balance between instructional and recreational time in the curriculum (Iran) and lack of extra-curricular activities to make the school a fun place for children (Sudan)
- Late distribution of textbooks to remote rural areas (Iran)

iv) **STUDENT EVALUATION**

- Exclusive reliance on standard, inflexible examinations to evaluate academic performance (true of all MENA countries except Sudan)
- Absence of formative and diagnostic evaluation of teacher and student performance for early identification and resolution of problems (Iran)
- Academic failure and class repetition (Iraq, Jordan, Syria)

b) **Family-Centered Reasons**

Thirty three family-centered causes of school drop-out that actually pull the child out of the educational system due to a range of social, economic and cultural reasons were identified in the MENA countries.

i. **Economic Causes**

- Parental poverty and need for child labour in both rural and urban communities to generate additional income (in the case of girls, they may be needed both for agricultural tasks and household chores) (Egypt, Iraq, Syria)
- Parental preference for their children (especially boys) to learn a vocation not requiring formal schooling to cover family expenses instead of continuing education (Syria, Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt)
- Rural-urban migration in search of work leading to the displacement and final drop-out of the children from school (Iran, Syria)
- Large family size and inability to cover expenses (Syria)

- Lack of family resources to support children in school due to direct and indirect educational costs (school fees, books, stationery) (Iran)
- Low budget allocated to education among poor families compared to the percentage of income spent on food, rent, household expenses, clothing, health and transportation (Jordan)
- Parental choice to avoid indirect educational costs by sending their children to non-formal literacy classes where they are provided with free books and stationery with no obligation to wear uniforms (Iran)

ii. **Socio-Cultural Causes**

- Parental indifference to formal education (Syria)
- Lack of awareness as to the value of schooling (Iran)
- Predominance of an illiterate environment at home and isolation from cultural life, especially in rural areas (Djibouti, Sudan)
- Lack of proper atmosphere for studying at home (due to parental indifference or overcrowded living quarters) (Syria)
- Demand on the girl-child, especially the oldest, to help the mother at home and take care of the younger siblings and/or perform outside chores (true of all MENA countries)
- Withdrawal of girls from school due to prevailing customs and traditions (this occurs especially at the upper elementary levels -- grades five and six) (Syria)
- Parents with little or no education (uneducated parents may not consider schooling as a priority and cannot help their children with their homework) (Syria)
- Illiterate mothers and the absence of an educated female role model (Iran)
- Parental objection to the education of girls in co-educational settings, especially upon reaching puberty (Iran)
- Family objection to girls travelling a long distance to school, especially after dark (Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen)
- Parental submission to community indifference or objection to formal schooling (Iran)

- Parental view of male education as a sound investment since boys are regarded as the preservers of the family name versus discrimination against the girl-child as eventually "belonging " to her husband's family (Djibouti, Iran, Tunisia)
- Parental reluctance to send daughters to schools with male teachers, especially if they are not local residents and, therefore, unknown to the community (Iraq, Iran, Tunisia, Algeria, Yemen, Sudan)
- Parental view of primary education as a dead end with no possibility for further education (Iran)
- Considering an educated girl as a "liability" rather than an "asset", with less chances of getting married (Tunisia)
- Given a choice, parents pull their girls out of school first due to the "traditional work distribution" in the family and the burden of domestic work on the girl-child, especially the first born (Iran, Tunisia)
- Family view that education "brings no plus to the rural way of life," especially for girls (Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen, Sudan)
- Not "dramatizing" school drop-out and regarding it as acceptable by the parents. In other words, viewing the future of the girl after dropping out of school as "simply the continuity of the past, with no education". (Tunisia)
- According a secondary position to the girl-child, resulting in indifference to her education (Egypt, Iran)
- Questioning education as a key to social mobility due to substantial unemployment rates and return to "past life" among school leavers whose education has not provided them with the skills needed in today's workplace (Iran, Lebanon)
- Change in the societal value system, whereby families have started to "devalue education because of the low income attained by the educated" (Egypt, Iran)

- Viewing education as a non-priority in a "climate of despair" brought about by political instability and economic hardship (Djibouti, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, West Bank / Gaza)
- Belief that "there is no use in sending a girl to school" since her "destiny is to be a housewife, taken care of by her husband" (Iran, Tunisia) and parental questioning of the utility and relevance of formal education in preparing girls for their "future functions" -- skills that can very well be learned at home (Sudan, Syria)
- Early marriage among girls (Iran, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti)
- Lack of schools for married girls in communities that forbid close interaction between married and single girls in school (Iran)
- Belief that formal education is rendering a dis-service to the young by distancing them from their parents' life-style and not offering them a better future (Iran)

c) **Child-Centered Reasons**

The child may have no choice but to drop-out of school as a result of the forceful push and pull-out factors mentioned above, or he/she may choose to leave school for personal reasons. Whatever the reason may be, twenty one child-centered causes are identified, as follows:

- Lack of interest in school, dislike for school, regarding the school as an unpleasant place, and the personal decision of the child not to continue education (Iran, Syria, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, Djibouti, Egypt)
- Fear of school punishment (Iran, Syria)
- Inability to adapt to the school environment (Syria)
- Dislike of other schoolchildren and/or inability to make friends (Iran)
- Jealousy and competition among children (mainly regarding material possessions)
- Embarrassment over being physically mature, especially among girls (Iran)
- Continuous tardiness due to chores inside or outside the house (Iran)

- High rate of absenteeism and irregular attendance (Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Djibouti)
- Being overage due to prior repetition (Iraq)
- Being underage due to incorrect/false birth certificates (Iran)
- Inability to understand the language of instruction (Djibouti) in the case of linguistic minorities (Iran)
- No prior pre-school/preparatory experience (true of all MENA countries)
- Inability to concentrate due to physical exhaustion or hunger (Sudan, Syria, Djibouti, Yemen)
- Lack of time to do homework or prepare for exams (Iran)
- Prolonged illness (Iran)
- Malnutrition (Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen)
- Gap between "school culture" and "home culture", leading to the child's estrangement from the school environment (Djibouti)
- Psychological disturbances brought about by the trauma of living in an emergency situation (Iraq, Lebanon, West Bank\ Gaza, Algeria, Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen)
- Embarrassment and guilt over past failure/repetition (Iran, Iraq)
- Increase in the number of street children and child labour in times of economic hardship (Jordan, Lebanon)
- Internalization of the message of failure and inability transmitted by the school, especially in the case of the girls (Iran)

The factors identified above are among the most important and most frequently cited obstacles to school completion in the MENA region. Recommendations for action to reduce or eliminate the hindering elements should pay close attention to their origin. Factors originating in the school system may be more easily eliminated through careful planning and sound administrative reform. However, deep-rooted, long-lasting social and cultural traditions are hard to change. Furthermore, transforming the economic realities that lead families to withdraw children from school is certainly beyond the control of educators. Thus, action recommendations should take into consideration short- as well as long-term alternatives and parallel solutions.

v. ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Two approaches may be undertaken in addressing the underlying reasons for school drop-out and recommending solutions to overcome the problem. The two approaches are based on different points of view regarding the roots of poverty. Since the map of school drop-out overlaps, for the most part, the map of poverty, it is important to clarify how poverty is viewed before addressing solutions to the drop-out problem.

One point of view regards the poor as weak and incapable, usually due to their own "inadequacies" and/or deprivation, and requiring assistance from the more fortunate members of society. Since this viewpoint usually calls for policies to facilitate the distribution of goods and benefits and for the provision of opportunities from above, it is hereafter referred to as the *charity approach*. The other point of view regards the poor as able and strong, but in a disadvantaged position as a result of discriminatory social, political, economic and cultural policies that have victimized them and then blamed the victims. This viewpoint is based on the belief that enduring rights are those that are taken and not given. Hence, it emphasizes consciousness-raising to focus the attention of the disadvantaged on the real causes of their poverty, and strengthen them in their struggle against discrimination and inequality. This viewpoint is hereafter referred to as the *empowerment approach*. Although commonalities may be found in both views, they differ considerably in their approach to poverty and to the school drop-out problem, which is usually a by-product of poverty. The recommendations that follow are for the most part, but not exclusively, based on the empowerment viewpoint, contending that charity leads to dependency in the long run.

It is also strongly believed that eliminating the drop-out problem is possible only through an integrated, multi-dimensional approach. The following recommendations, therefore, emphasize both the need for commitment and cooperation on behalf of those at the top and the importance of participatory grass-roots activities among the disadvantaged themselves. The MENA region has essentially witnessed top-to-bottom educational reform, initiated and undertaken by the elite within the charity framework. Rarely has participatory action been experienced where the disadvantaged themselves have played a central role in educational decision-making, implementation and evaluation. The present researcher contends that the cycle of poverty may not be broken without firm belief in the potential strength of the poor and investment in their abilities. There is no doubt that politics plays

a crucial role in providing the ground for action, yet real and persistent success depends on raising the awareness of and mobilizing the disadvantaged themselves.

It should be noted that the action recommendations introduced below are based on the causes of school drop-out identified in the previous section. As a result, the classification of causes into in-school and out-of-school phenomena and further division into problems faced by the school, the family and the child has led to five main categories of solutions:

a) Child-Centered Recommendations
b) Family-Centered Recommendations
c) Community-Centered Recommendations
d) Education-Oriented Recommendations
e) Leadership-Oriented Recommendations

The above categories are further divided into subgroups that will be discussed in detail later in this section. It is acknowledged in advance that the implementation of the recommendations can be facilitated through the support of the leadership and the presence of political and administrative will.

Every attempt has been made to provide cost-effective, region-specific and culture-sensitive recommendations and avoid strategies that do not suit the realities of the MENA region. The feasibility and effectiveness of each recommendation may be realistically evaluated only after implementation. It is also worth noting that the following recommendations can only act as guidelines for addressing the school drop-out problem. Success is guaranteed only if each recommendation is discussed in depth with the potential partners and implemented with their active support. The presentation of solutions without the support and conviction of those most concerned does not have the same chance of succeeding as recommendations that are discussed and adapted to existing and changing realities. Research has shown time and again that participatory needs assessment and identification of problems and solutions yield the best results in terms of action, since the most persistent allies are those who have actively participated in the process.

a) Child-Centered Recommendations

The key element here is helping the child, both the one who drops-out and the one who has already experienced repetition and/or drop-out. Mechanisms to help the child range from early identification of the problem(s) to the provision of remedial programmes. Thus, the following recommendations address the needs of the child at the pre-school and in-school stages.

1. Provide Preparatory Training

The centralized system of education that exists in most MENA countries is based, in the most part, on the needs and abilities of the urban, middle class, male student living in times of peace and stability. There is little, if any, attention to the needs of rural and nomadic children and the realities of daily life for the girl-child. There are also no special measures recommended for times of rapid change and insecurity brought about by conflict. There is a standard yardstick for measuring the academic achievement of children from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. The criteria for competition are the same for all, although the starting point is quite different for many. The rationale for recommending the use of preparatory training is based on the rules of a game that does not give all the competitors the same chance of success.

i) Who needs preparatory training?

All children whose life conditions do not prepare them for school competition, including poor, rural, nomadic children and those who live on the margins of urban centers need preparatory training. Children whose mother tongue is different from the formal language of instruction, yet who must compete with native speakers also require this training. Children who are wage earners or must help the family with chores inside and outside the house need it, as do those who live in overcrowded homes with no room to study. Preparatory training is also needed by children whose parents are illiterate and/or do not believe in the benefits of education; by those living in environments with a dominant oral tradition; by migrant and refugee children in a state of transition as well as by children of war who have experienced fear, anxiety and insecurity. All this does not mean that middle and upper

class urban children should be deprived of preparatory training; it implies that disadvantaged children should receive more attention.

ii) Why is preparatory training needed?

Certainly not because the above-mentioned children are "culturally-deprived" or are disadvantaged in terms of their "cultural capital", due to the "low culture" of their family and community environment, as the literature of the 1960s and early 1970s suggested regarding minority children or those living in "traditional" countries of the developing world. The reason is, rather, that existing systems of education enforce standard criteria of school assessment and educational evaluation. This is only an attempt to help the child begin at the same starting point as others with whom he/she must compete. It is an effort to familiarize the child with the "school culture" before the competition begins (Massialas and Jarrar 1991). It is held that the culture transmitted by the school "confirms and sustains the culture of dominant groups while marginalizing and silencing the cultures of subordinate groups of students" (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991 : 49). Disadvantaged children, therefore, need a "head start" in this competition.

iii) How should preparatory training be provided?

Through pre-schooling, non-formal alternatives, and at home.

a) Pre-school. Pre-school in the MENA region is still regarded and treated as a luxury and not yet considered a government priority. The evidence is the shortage of public day-care centers, nurseries and kindergartens in the cities and their virtual absence in rural areas; dominance of the private sector investment in this field; minimal government spending on and supervision of early childhood development programmes; absence of compulsory and free pre-school education; shortage of qualified teachers specialized in early childhood development; and limited pre-school programmes and activities geared towards promoting creativity among children. Many still view pre-schools as substitute mothers and baby- sitting centers to be used by working mothers and/or those who can afford them. Pre-schools are not yet regarded

as important early childhood development centers that can enhance cognitive, emotional and psycho-social growth among children.

Ironically, the children who need pre-schooling most are those who will never receive any preparatory training before attending school. It is, therefore, crucial to render pre-schools into popular education centers instead of the exclusive institutes that most of them have become. Potential partners who can help mobilize support and establish pre-schools in areas where they are most needed are: government officials, the private sector, members of the local community, the families themselves, the media, women's organizations (such as the Tunisian National Women's Union - UNFT), voluntary groups and non-government organizations (NGOs), especially those that are village-based and those operating in impoverished areas. Building a strong network, to which its members can contribute through financial assistance, training of pre-school teachers, providing space and resources, purchasing or producing games, toys, books, posters, magazines and other educationas aids, are all prerequisites for an integrated approach which seeks to enrich the life of the child prior to formal school.

The effectiveness of pre-schools in preparing children for the next phase of education depends to a great extent on the ability to provide resources at no cost to the children and their families, on the pre- and in-service training of teachers specialised in early childhood development, selected among the members of the local community, and on creating a rich environment in which the learning and development needs of the children are met through innovative, creative and interactive teaching methods. Equally important is the role of the pre-school in acting as a transitory institution; it is neither the home nor the school, yet it carries elements of both. The pre-school should, therefore, provide a kind and happy environment that is encouraging, conducive to learning and able to enhance the intellectual, emotional and social abilities of the child early in his/her life. Pre-schools can play an important role in the lives of slow learners, children neglected by their family, psychologically disturbed children, non-social children and those living under especially difficult circumstances, by providing psychological services

and teaching coping skills at times of trauma and hardship. In fact, pre-schooling is so important that serious attempts should be made to make it a compulsory and indispensable part of basic education by attaching it to the primary school itself and training specialized teachers to prepare the very young for entrance to the formal school.

b) Non-formal Alternatives. It may be argued that establishing pre-school centers, training specialized staff and producing learning materials impose costs that cannot be afforded by most MENA countries at this time. Under such circumstances, the provision of pre-primary education may be considered as a long-term plan while, in the short-run, existing non-formal community alternatives can be identified and used. One such alternative is the Islamic school found in many parts of the region, also known as Khalwa (Sudan), Maktab (Iran), Qur'anic school (Morocco) and Malaama (Djibouti).

Qur'anic schools have been in use since the advent of Islam in order to impart the fundamentals of religion. They have traditionally taught rudimentary reading, writing and arithmetic, while focussing on religious training and the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an. Although the introduction of modern schooling in the nineteenth century led to the weakening and even total abolishment of such traditional centers, Qur'anic schools continue to exist in various MENA countries. Parents, especially in rural areas, willingly send their children to such schools, believing that they provide sound religious education and moral training, necessary prerequisites for becoming a good Muslim. It is often found that the very same girls who are pulled out of the formal school for a variety of reasons are eagerly sent to Qur'anic schools as they provide a religiously and culturally valued education not found in modern institutions.

The identification and use of traditional indigenous centers of education as alternatives to modern pre-schools is recommended for two reasons. First, they already exist, especially in the poorest, least accessible and most traditional areas (Wagner 1989). There is, therefore, no need for investment in new and unknown institutions that may take years before their benefits are

recognized and accepted. And second, they are community alternatives that have long been respected and supported by families who regard it as their moral and religious duty to send their children to such schools. The close link between Qur'anic education and the local environment and indigenous culture, its flexibility in terms of age of students (especially boys) and place and duration of study, the introduction of the Arabic language to non-Arabic speaking children, the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills, the introduction of school discipline and the segregation of boys and girls are considered as further advantages.

Most families are convinced of the religious and cultural significance of traditional schools, yet they may doubt their academic relevance. Parents may send their children to pre-schools in order to prepare them for formal education, but the function of the Qur'anic school is still unclear in terms of imparting the skills and knowledge needed for modern education. A few steps can be taken to render traditional schooling academically viable and attractive, such as replacing rote memorization by active learning, enriching the curriculum to include modern subject matters, using instructors with formal school certificates alongside traditional religious teachers, replacing strict authoritarian teaching methods with those conducive to early childhood development and introducing games and playing opportunities for children. The above measures may help educators tap the valuable resources that Qur'anic schools provide and make them valued alternatives to modern pre-schools.

c) *Home-Based Early Childhood Development*. Although the key role of the home in meeting children's early development needs is clear to many, much remains to be done to enrich the home environment and raise parental awareness. The reason may be exclusive concentration on the child's health and nutrition and less attention paid to his/her cognitive and psycho-social development needs, or the belief that not much can be done in illiterate, poverty-ridden and overcrowded homes. In fact, the very home environment found mainly in rural and poor urban areas is the one needing enrichment. A serious attempt should be made to raise the consciousness of families

regarding the importance of early childhood development through increasing their parenting and child-rearing knowledge and skills. This is where mobile training units, inter-sectoral cooperation betweeen the education and health divisions, and the media can play a role. Cooperation between the health and education sectors in sending training teams to the villages and the margins of the big cities can make it possible to reach otherwise inaccessible caregivers. These teams provide parental education about child-rearing attitudes and practices that enrich the child's early life. Meanwhile, the media can be used to produce and broadcast parental education programmes dealing with the stages of child growth (physical, emotional and cognitive), parenting skills and the importance of the child's early development on his/her future academic achievement. Since these may not be considered as priorities among poor families who can hardly feed their children, voluntary groups, village-based NGOs and women's organizations can be mobilized as partners in providing toys and children's books and establishing children's centers where literate members of the community may read to the young children and engage them in educational games. Furthermore, travelling theater and pantomime groups using folklore and local themes can provide educational entertainment for young children by stimulating them intellectually.

The above recommendations concerning the provision of preparatory training are aimed at creating a rich learning environment during the early years of the child's life in order to empower him/her in the competition that begins at the formal school.

2. Provide Mobile Counselling Units

Once the child is enrolled in school, measures should be undertaken to follow up his/her progress in order to identify any academic, psychological, social and/or economic difficulty that may hinder his/her achievement. The rationale behind this recommendation is that early detection of the problem will provide the opportunity to intervene and introduce remedial action before it leads to drop-out. It may be argued that this is the responsibility of the school. True. Yet, as mentioned in the previous sections, lack of follow-up on the part of the school administrator and the low morale and sense of commitment among many teachers have led to high levels of school wastage in the region. In addition, whereas the family is usually in the best

position to detect the problem, it may not be realistic to expect poor and illiterate families to identify and report any difficulty to school authorities. It is therefore suggested that another mechanism - the mobile counseling unit - be used in order to fill the vacuum or complement the school effort.

Each counselling unit may be composed of representatives of the health and education sector who can visit families and schools in order to prepare a report on each pupil. In certain MENA countries, such as Iran, the rural health worker and the village guidance teacher already exist, and this measure may be introduced at no extra cost. The report can include information on the child's nutrition, health and academic progress as well as on the family's living conditions and the school environment. Through careful observation of the educational activities and interviews with parents and school authorities, the counselling team can obtain first-hand information regarding the difficulties faced by the child. Psychological and/or academic counselling may then be offered on the basis of the problems identified. Should the obstacle be poverty, the need for the child's labour inside or outside the home or the lack of parental awareness regarding the benefits of schooling, the community and the school authorities may be mobilized to help the child overcome the problem. A two-fold aim is pursued here : first, the child will not be left alone to face family and school problems, by providing him/her with the necessary support; and second, a sense of responsibility and accountability will be created among members of the school, family and community once they realize that an expert and caring team is providing follow-up and assistance whenever needed. It is crucial for the mobile counselling unit not to present itself as an investigator or reporter, thus creating anxiety and mistrust. Instead, it must act as a coordinator and guide. This is why using educated members in each region, as opposed to government officials from the capital, may be more effective. It should be noted that psychological counselling is especially needed by schoolchildren living in difficult conditions of conflict, war and trauma.

3. Provide Peer Tutoring

Whereas the mobile counselling unit can provide help in terms of removing out-of-school obstacles, the child's academic problems can be addressed through

school-based units. Educational support is usually provided by remedial classes offered throughout the academic year or during the holiday season. Yet, formal classes and the use of teachers may entail costs that neither the family nor the school can afford.

A cost-effective alternative may be the use of peer tutors who can help their classmates. Peer tutors can work on a voluntary basis as part of their community work or perform extracurricular activities, as mentioned in subsequent sections. Incentives can also be provided through rewards (medals, presents, field trips, summer camps, books) given to peer tutors. Creating a sense of brotherhood and partnership among schooichildren may be a welcome side effect of establishing peer tutoring.

4. Establish Houses of Culture

Yet another child-centered measure may be providing a literate and cultural environment for the child, whose life among illiterate families in poor areas does not stimulate him/her intellectually and/or prepare him/her for the "school culture" Establishing houses of culture in rural and poor urban areas can be one such effort. The services provided by such centers may include reading rooms, libraries, exhibitions, plays and films, educational games, painting, drawing, book and poetry reading, concerts, animation, pantomime, handicrafts and calligraphy.

It is usually easier to establish such houses of culture in the cities, while villages may benefit more from mobile units. The school or community center can act as the coordinating center, run by local volunteers, where there is no other facility. What is important is to reach children whose illiterate home environment does not provide them with such enriching cultural experiences. The initial budget may be provided by the government, the community or the existing Muslim tradition of **Vaqf**, whereby a wealthy member of the society donates money, land or a building as an act of good will. The houses of culture can then be maintained through the sale of handicrafts or artwork produced by the children. The activities conducted at such centers enable the children to discover their interests and talents while raising the self-esteem of those whose school performance has cast doubts on their abilities and thus

lowered their self-confidence. These centers can even provide study space for children whose overcrowded homes do not allow them to do their homework.

5. Provide Continued Education for Drop-Outs

So far the focus of our attention has been on children enrolled in school, and recommendations have aimed at identifying and helping those most likely to drop out.

Here we will address those who have dropped out with little or no chances of returning to the school. Some of the field studies conducted in the region, including Iran (in progress) and Syria (1991-92), point to the sense of sadness, anxiety, boredom and uselessness experienced by female drop-outs, especially those who did not leave school out of their own accord but were pushed out of the educational system. Furthermore, most of them reported that they cannot or will not return to school. The argument presented here is that the drop-out should not be abandoned. A few measures are thus recommended in order to help these children:

i) Post-Literacy Classes. Provisions should be made to enroll drop-outs in post-literacy programmes equivalent to primary school in order to prevent relapse into illiteracy. The classes should be accessible to rural and working children by being flexible in terms of time, duration and venue. In addition, distribution of free textbooks and stationery, as is the custom for literacy programmes in the region as well as absence of uniforms provide incentives for children who discontinue formal schooling due to strict regulations. Lowering the entrance age for post-literacy class enrollment and grouping similar age students further facilitate the attendance of drop-outs.

ii) Alternative Centers of Learning. Older children, young girls married at an early age, and those who have repeatedly failed school are among those who cannot enroll againg in formal institutions in most MENA countries. The establishment of evening schools or class meetings in places of worship, as in the case of Iran, and community centers will provide this population with continued education. Basic life skills can be integrated in the curriculum in order to prepare them for life.

iii) Vocational Training. In order to prepare drop outs for the job market, an effort can be made to introduce technical, vocational or agricultural training for them. Industrial as well as agricultural centers may also join this endeavor in an integrated approach to teach income- generating skills. The content and format of vocational training should be based on careful needs assessment and determined by a coordinating body in order to link training with future employment.

iv) Education through the Media. Post-literacy education may also be provided through television and radio. Just as health, population and family-planning experts have used the media to raise public awareness, as in the case of Brazil, this "third channel" may be utilized for advocacy campaigns, mobilization and support for educational programmes (as in Bangladesh and Brazil) as well as for imparting information and knowledge. A serious attempt should be made, however, to produce and broadcast interesting and useful educational programmes that do not bore the audience. Combining education with arts and entertainment may be one way of avoiding the usual dullness that accompanies such programmes.

The above recommendations all focus on the child before, during and after he/she attends school. The purpose is to help the child and not leave him/her to face school drop-out alone. The next section will move from the child to his/her immediate environment: the family.

b) Family-Centered Recommendations

Despite the crucial importance of the school in keeping the child or discouraging him/her from attending classes, the family still plays a significant role in school drop-out or desertion. The family is not only an important socializing agent, but also an element of stability at times of rapid change, as is so often experienced in the MENA countries. Identified as a "pull-out" factor, the family can be supported and educated in an attempt to eliminate the reasons for withdrawal. It should be noted that our audience here is not the family who is against education from the very beginning, but rather the one that has once sent its child to school but

pulled him/her out due to internal and/or external reasons. Convincing the family of the benefits of continuing school may at times be very challenging.

1. Involve the Family

Here the basic approach is to seek realistic solutions with the active participation of the family. The parents should be involved in identifying the reasons for drop out, recommending solutions and participating in the elimination of factors that hinder school attendance. The family's active participation at every stage is more likely to lead to actions than the dissemination of information from above.

The family can be contacted at home, place of worship or community center by trustworthy members of the community, accompanied by educational researchers and practitioners, in order to assess needs and attitudes. It is important to differentiate between families whose attitude towards education leads them to pull their children out of school, especially the girl-child, and families whose living conditions do not allow them to keep their children in school. Addressing the parents' negative attitude towards education requires a different strategy than addressing their dire need for the child's help at home. Since there is no single solution to such contrasting reasons for drop-out, the family should be consulted in order to provide necessary guidelines.

The ultimate goal here is to seek the involvement of the family at every stage -- through problem identification, decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation. It is acknowledged that the poor and marginal families' long-lasting "culture of silence" (Freire 1986), lack of self-confidence and tradition of passive resistance may pose obstacles. But the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect will eventually bring about their active participation.

2. Raise the Family's Awareness

This measure is undertaken if the reason for pull-out is identified as disbelief in the utility and relevance of continued education. The presupposition is not that the family is unaware or ignorant, but rather that its view of education does not serve the cause pursued here. Increasing parental awareness about the potential benefits of education along with consciousness-raising efforts to change the negative attitude of families towards the relevance and utility of education for girls are examples of raising family awareness programmes. It should be noted, however, that real attitudinal change comes about only if families are convinced. Thus correct efforts should be made to render education truly relevant and useful. More will be said of this in the following sections. Raising the family's awareness can be achieved through the advocacy efforts of local NGOs, women's organizations, religious leaders, the media and the school authorities through parent-teacher associations. Yet another available means is literacy education for adults. Messages related to the benefits of schooling should be incorporated in the content of literacy programmes and discussed in class.

The target audience of consciousness-raising efforts has usually been the mothers, traditionally viewed as the primary caregivers. Given the dominant role of the husband, father or brother in the majority of Middle Eastern households, it may be equally important to address the male members of the family as well. Once the entire family views education as an asset that empowers the disadvantaged child, one can say that advocacy efforts have been successful.

3. Empower the Family

The family cannot be left alone to struggle with the serious factors that lead to school drop-out. Raising the consciousness of families without providing mechanisms to support them will turn out to be futile. If school pull-out has its roots in poverty and in the need for child labour, necessary measures should be undertaken to support the family and reduce its burden. This does not mean charitable donations that may bring about dependency, but

rather the mobilization of community as well as government support in order to empower the family.

Families may be supported through various means, such as loans, teaching of income-generating skills and creating local markets to purchase their goods in order to equip them with necessary tools and thus enable them to fight poverty. Breaking the cycle of poverty through self-help, as opposed to periodical charity, is a sure way of guaranteeing the family's ability to make ends meet and to provide educational opportunities for the children. Furthermore, the original concept of family involvement will bring about well-directed efforts that address the real needs of the target group.

c) Community-Centered Recommendations

Efforts to involve, raise awareness of and empower the families in order to prevent them from pulling their children out of school have fewer chances of success if there is no attempt to deal with the larger community. The family is part of the community, and the values, beliefs and norms of the latter are usually reflected in the decisions of the former. Rarely do families in closed communities act independently or differently from what is deemed acceptable by the community at large. In fact, involving and the community increases the chances of convincing parents to keep their children, especially girls, in school. Two steps should be taken here: first, identifying and mobilizing partners among the members of the community; and second, providing them with the means to raise the awareness of the community at large.

1. Introduce Educated Role Models

The absence of a significant number of educated people in poor communities, the migration of the educated rural population to the cities and the upward social mobility provided by educational attainment have led to limited contact between the target population in the community and its educated members. The absence of educated role models is even more evident among the female population, for whom daily responsibilities are often

limited to the home or the field with minimum contact with the outside world. As mentioned before, one of the doubts raised by the family and the community regarding the utility of education, especially for girls, is the belief that schooling makes no difference in their lives. Steps undertaken to identify educated role models, such as teachers, nurses, health practitioners, agricultural and educated community workers - preferably known by the local residents - and presenting their work and success can undermine the prevailing skepticism among the community members. The role models, by their example, can also act as agents of change or "animators". These non-formal educators are the product of the education system, and their achievements can lead to a reassessment of the value of further schooling.

2. Invite Speakers

Inviting speakers regularly, from a variety of backgrounds, to advocate and illustrate the benefits of continued education can make a difference in expanding the community horizons. Speakers can range from high-ranking government and education authorities to members of well-known community-based NGOs and local cooperatives. The presence of mutual trust and respect and serious avoidance of superficial sloganizing along with community involvement in identifying and inviting speakers are the prerequisites of success in this endeavor.

3. Mobilize Influential Members of the Community

Most communities in the MENA region, especially in rural areas, share in common the informal selection of one or more of their members deemed to be the most trustworthy and respected. Many family and community decisions await the opinion of those whose viewpoint is accepted by the majority. Influential members of each community may be chosen from among the elderly or the religious leaders. These are the people whose opinion on education has an impact on keeping or pulling the child out of school. The identification of such leading figures and their mobilization as partners in the combat against school drop-out can make a difference. Serious

effort should be made to gain the active support of the influential members of the community, usually religious leaders, trusted conflict resolvers or charitable donors in the community, who can, in turn, convince the parents of the advantages of continued education for their children.

These influential members can also provide support in the search for community assistance to families who have had to pull their children out of school due to economic reasons or need for child labour. Trusted figures in the community can collect and distribute funds for this purpose by encouraging collective action. They can also act as links with voluntary organizations in initiating self-help projects in their community. In fact, investment in self-help projects, as opposed to seeking charity, eventually leads to the real empowerment of the family and the community.

Where can such consciousness-raising campaigns be launched? Public speeches can be delivered at community meeting places, houses of culture, schools and places of worship. Yet, in order to make it more personal and leave a long-lasting impression, educated role models should make an effort to make house visits. Every attempt should be made to respect the local customs and traditions regarding home visits, but once permitted to enter the private realm of the family, the animator will have a better chance of conveying the message.

d) Education-Oriented Recommendations

So far there has been minimum utilization of the formal schooling system in combating drop-out, and individuals, families and communities have been assigned the task of eliminating this problem. The educational institution must also shoulder the responsibility through two channels - formal schools and non-formal alternatives. Despite the often overwhelming bureaucracy and rigid organizational structure of the education system, we may find it easier to change the school as opposed to bringing about fundamental transformation in the long-standing traditions and viewpoints of the family and community.

Within the formal educational system, reforms have to be made with regard to curricular content, instructional methods, teacher-student relations, school calendar and location, teacher selection, training and assignment, academic evaluation, role of teachers, extra-curricular activities, remedial education and school accountability. As far as non-formal education is concerned, every effort should be made to establish parallel and equally accredited alternatives.

Studies conducted in the MENA region on the drop-out problem point to the inability of the formal system to retain the entire student population in school, especially the girls and the poor. The reasons for the shortcomings of the educational system were discussed in depth in the section on in-school factors leading to drop-out. Here, action recommendations are proposed to bring about school reform to eliminate drop-out. The ultimate aim is to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of formal education, help children acquire basic cognitive and problem-solving skills and make them responsible and committed members of their community.

1. Adapt the School to Local Conditions and Needs

It has long been argued that an overcentralized system of educational planning and implementation will inevitably lead to discrimination against those living on the margins. There has also been a long-standing debate on the risks of over-centralization (Torres, Education News, November 1994), and the inability of the central system to delegate responsibility to local authorities for fear of unequal distribution of resources. The solution may be minor-scale localization while decentralization is awaited. In other words, educational authorities can adapt the school to local conditions without fundamental alterations. Localization may be initiated to be relevant to the issue of school calendar and curricular content.

i) Adjust the School Calendar: The school calendar in most MENA countries matches daily life in the cities, with little consideration for the harvest season in the rural areas and seasonal migration of nomadic

groups. Daily school meetings during the peak of agricultural tasks either deprives the family of the child's much needed labour or leads to his/her continuous absence, possibly resulting in school failure. The wide variation in temperatures in various MENA countries results in children attending school in extreme heat or cold. Furthermore, stationary schools with daily classes lead the nomadic child to be absent at times of seasonal migration. These are the children who are lost to the educational system for reasons that have to do with the exigencies of daily life and survival. Rendering the school sensitive to local conditions by adjusting its calendar to seasonal life in various parts of the country will prevent long-term educational wastage. Condensing the academic year during the non-harvest season for rural children, reducing the school hours for children who shoulder specific responsibilities at home or outside, without sacrificing quality, and providing tent or mobile schools for the nomadic populations are examples of adaptation to local conditions.

ii) Make the Curriculum Useful and Relevant: Yet another obstacle is the family or community view that education is not relevant to the present life of the child or useful for his/her future. Traditionally regarded as the key to social mobility, formal schooling is being increasingly viewed as useless or even harmful as it separates the child from his/her traditional lifestyle with little preparation for the future. In the case of the girl-child, education is regarded as a liability that renders her unmarriageable. The reason is simply that families do not see the benefits of schooling in the immediate lives of their children, and arguments regarding education as a social gain and its contribution to national development are too abstract to be convincing. Therefore, serious attempt should be made to persuade families.

This does not mean that the school should no longer teach basic cognitive abilities and concentrate only on skills needed in daily life.

This will discriminate against the disadvantaged even further by designing an "inferior" curriculum that cannot compete with the classical one. What is implied here is that children should be taught basic life skills in addition to the core curriculum. This could be done by supplementing the school agenda with books, exercises and activities related to local needs or dedicating specific school hours to teaching practical skills. The family and the community should actively participate in determining the priorities and providing guidelines in order to make the curriculum truly relevant and useful. The choice may be adding primary health care, nutrition, first aid, vocational training, agricultural skills, animal husbandry, poultry, home economics, carpet weaving, embroidery, handicrafts production or fishing, to the regular curriculum taught by local experts and not necessarily professional teachers. The priorities depend on the local will and needs. An important ingredient of any change or addition, however, should be designing gender-sensitive curricula that empower the girl-child and producing gender-sensitive textbooks free of bias and stereotypes that introduce both male and female role models.

2. Equip the Teachers

A centralized system of teacher training cannot prepare instructors for teaching in remote, poverty-stricken areas. Furthermore, once the teacher begins work, he/she cannot be left alone to deal with a variety of problems ranging from housing, food and transportation to unfamiliarity with indigenous customs and lack of acceptance by the community. The steps to prepare and equip the teacher are as follows:

i) Provide Adequate Pre-Service Training

The content of teacher training is traditionally concentrated on familiarity with the teaching materials, textbooks, instructional methods, grading, examinations and maintenance of school discipline. The young and inexperienced teacher is then sent to remote rural areas

or rough urban centers to deal with a multitude of educational as well as social and economic problems. Whether he/she has chosen teaching as a career or is an army conscript sent to complete his duty as a soldier-teacher, the teacher is usually totally unfamiliar with his/her place of service.

Serious effort should, therefore, be made to acquaint the inexperienced teacher with his/her future workplace before the completion of training. Familiarity with the area through visits and meetings with the community members can play a key role in modifying their indifference to or reluctant acceptance of a "stranger" in their midst. It was mentioned earlier that one of the reasons for school drop-out is the fact that the teacher is a non-native. This factor, particularly in the case of a male teacher among older female students, who does not speak the local language, has been deemed as a serious obstacle to the retention of children in school, as illustrated in the ongoing Iranian field research. Frequent visits prior to teaching will not only familiarize the instructor with his/her place of work and its local traditions but also help him/her gain community trust in advance. Teachers who are assigned to rural and nomadic areas should also be helped to get acquainted with the economic, social and cultural realities of their future workplace through books, monographs, ethnographic studies and films. This should be made part of the pre-service teacher training. Local educational authorities and experienced teachers in the region can be asked to develop such preparatory educational materials.

ii) Support the Teacher through In-Service Training

Various studies point to the use of physical punishment by the teacher. Fear of punishment has also been mentioned as one of the reasons for leaving school early. Whereas punishment is usually used to maintain discipline and quiet, its frequent occurrence may be the

result of the teacher's sense of inability and frustration brought about by problems inside or outside the school. Close supervision of the teachers' work, weekly, bi-weekly or monthly meetings where teachers in the region discuss their professional problems and achievements, question and answer sessions with educational authorities, paid, on-the-job training to update the teachers' knowledge and systematic communication among teachers, principals and parents are mechanisms used to ease the teachers' burden and support them in their difficult task. Additional attention paid to the teacher's housing, food and transportation will increase his/her satisfaction and sense of commitment. Low morale and turnover among teachers, especially those living and working in difficult situations, can be reversed through careful attention to their economic, professional, social and psychological needs. An interesting in-service upgrading of teacher's skills has been provided through the Indian experience of Shikshak Samakhya, whereby the teacher is empowered to take on a more active and participatory role in the process of education, resulting in higher respect for the teacher and the rejuvenation of the primary school experience.

iii) Train Local Teachers

Quite often, non-native teachers are transferred after a few years of service, taking away with them their experience and know-how. There is little that can prevent such transfer due to the natural desire of most teachers to live among their own kin in more convenient working conditions. In order to combat this loss of well-trained, experienced personnel, potential teachers should be selected among the local residents, especially women. The advantages of local teacher selection and training include prior familiarity with the region, sense of commitment to the community and reduced chance of transfer. Using local female teachers will also solve the traditional resistance of Middle Eastern families to send their single female relatives to work

in harsh, remote and unknown areas. Field studies in the region have led us to believe that there is less resistance to the use of local teachers, even if they are male, to teach older girls, mainly because they are "known" and thus trusted. As the experiences of Nepal and Bangladesh have illustrated, training local teachers will not be a lost investment.

iv) Promote Teachers as Animators

Dedicated teachers are rarely mere teachers; they are community workers, counsellors, agents of change, conflict resolvers and social reformers. Few teachers today perform such multi-faceted tasks; they have gradually become people who merely teach, conduct exams and grade students. The aim here is to transform teachers into animators, both in the community and in the school.

Most often the teachers are among the few educated members of the disadvantaged communities in which they work. They should, therefore, be equipped and aided to act as role models. This is even more significant in the case of female teachers who can leave a lasting impression on their female students. The teacher should actively participate in consciousness-raising campaigns to convince families of the importance of continued education for children. First, however, he/she should be actively involved in community affairs to gain the trust and respect of its members.

The teacher should act as an agent of cultural change and initiate the establishment of houses of culture. He/she should perform a facilitator-coordinator role, between the school and the family, by mobilizing the community to help students in need. The teacher must act as a trustworthy counsellor whose education and training allows him/her to provide informed help. Most important, the teacher should follow up the reasons for a child's continuous tardiness, exhaustion in

class, anxiety or repeated absence. He/she should be familiar with the students' living conditions, as the experience of BRAC and Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) has shown in Bangladesh. Teacher indifference, coupled with lack of attention on the part of the school administration, prevents early identification and remedy of the problems. It is obvious that an active, caring, respected and trusted teacher who pays close attention to the psycho-social needs of the students and goes beyond his/her traditional teaching tasks has a better chance of preventing school drop-out.

v) Beware of the Hidden Curriculum

A teacher may be well-educated, dedicated and caring, yet transmit messages that weaken the children and undermine their potential abilities. This is not done intentionally; it is rather a byproduct of the teacher's viewpoint that is transmitted indirectly through the hidden curriculum (Apple 1979). Separating academically weak children from the more capable ones and focussing one's energy on the latter while ignoring the former, empowering the boys as opposed to the girls, due to the belief that the latter do not need as much education as the former, intellectually stimulating the boys by expanding their horizons with regard to their academic and professional future, while ignoring the girls and making them feel content with performing their daily routine tasks forever are examples of the messages transmitted through the hidden curriculum that acts as a psychological push-out factor. Participant observation of classroom interaction and teacher-student relations are means of identifying such patterns. Conscious attempt should be made to raise the teachers' awareness in this regard during the pre- and in-service training period. Making teachers gender sensitive is an effective means of struggling against messages of inability that might lead to higher failure and drop-out rates among girls.

vi) Reward Exemplary Teachers

Exemplary teachers in this context are those who have had the lowest number of drop-outs in their classes and/or who have actively struggled to prevent school drop-out through innovative means. Identifying such successful teachers (while taking precautionary measures to avoid grade inflation and false reporting of academic achievement among students), and providing them with monetary and non-monetary rewards is a sure way of creating incentives for them. The teachers should be invited to actively participate in the campaign against school drop-out. Formation of discussion groups, seminars and conducting field studies in which teachers are involved in identifying solutions to the problems may pave the road for mobilizing them as potential partners and gain their support in the implementation of pilot or national-scale projects to eliminate school drop-out.

3. Make the School Child-Friendly

The school lies at the center of formal education. Its appearance and location as well as its treatment of children is crucial in attracting and keeping them. Unfortunately, most schools in poor areas are repulsive to adults, let alone children. Dingy, dark rooms with peeling paint and worn-out floors, furnished with broken tables and benches and old blackboards, lack of libraries, laboratories, playgrounds and school gardens are some of the features of rural and poor urban schools. All this is enough to make the school unattractive to the child and his/her family who expect the school to be a better place than home. Furthermore, the teacher is usually an authoritarian character whose lack of sufficient knowledge about child psychology and local conditions renders him/her even more dry and inflexible. The emphasis on discipline and fear of student participation in classroom activities often leads the teacher to use harsh words, if not physical punishment, to maintain calm and quiet. In addition, the traditional role of the teacher as the sole source of truth and knowledge and the absence of interactive teaching methods make the children members of an audience which cannot experience the joy of

discovery and self-learning. Furthermore, the distance many rural children have to walk to reach school and the objection of the girls' families to have them sit in a class with members of the opposite sex and be taught by a male teacher add to the existing complications. The above-mentioned physical, psychological, socio-cultural and educational factors all contribute to making the school an unfriendly place that encourages drop-out. The following interventions may be introduced to make the school child-friendly, with special attention paid to the needs of the girl-child:

i) Reduce the Distance Between Home and School

Parents may willingly send their children to school in the first place, yet pull them out when they realize that school does not cater to the realities of their daily life. The long distance between the home and the school is one such example. Many rural and nomadic children have to walk considerable distances to reach their classes in often harsh geographic and climatic conditions. Many reach their school late and exhausted. The situation is more serious for girls. Anxious for their security, especially at dark, and worried about possible male companionship, many parents prefer to pull their daughters out of school to prevent misfortune. Building schools close to the home or providing transportation between the two places will eliminate at least this reason for school pull-out.

ii) Provide Gender-Segregated Classes

The study on school desertion points to the fact that drop-out among girls occurs mostly during the last grades of primary school. Parental opposition to sending their daughters to co-educational schools upon maturity is a major reason for pull-out. Providing sex-segregated classes or operating on a double shift basis - with the girls attending school in the morning, followed by boys in the afternoon - is a measure accommodating the dominant community values.

iii) Employ Female Teachers

Sometimes co-educational centers of learning are not the main problem since classmates are either relatives or members of a close community. The issue is rather the male teacher who is often unknown to the community. Being male, single and an outsider is the cause of real concern among family members. The problem is exacerbated in countries where young conscripts or soldiers are sent to teach in remote villages as part of their military service. They are totally unknown and their transitory working conditions make them least trusted by the parents. The solution here is the gradual and systematic recruitment and training of female teachers, preferably from the local community, while using older, married teachers in the interim. Whenever possible, educational authorities should identify and hire "teaching couples", i.e. husband and wife who are teachers and can work in rural areas without any threat to their family life.

iv) Provide Free Nutrition at School

Poor children often come to school hungry, unable to concentrate in class and absorb the information being taught. Providing free nutrition, however minimal , is a real incentive for such children and their families. Since the provision of even minimum nutrition may be a burden, it is suggested that a school garden be provided in which children can plant fruits or vegetables that can feed them without imposing additional costs. The extra produce of large school gardens can even be sold on the local market in exchange for school supplies. Here, the school garden is introduced in order to feed children through their own efforts without making them recipients of charity. Involvement in maintaining a school garden also leads to a highly cherished sense of cooperation and self-sufficiency among the children while, at the same time, teaching them important life-skills.

v) Make the School A Fun and Attractive Place to Be In

The school is not an army barracks and school children are not soldiers. The motto of drill and discipline, therefore, should not be applied

to the young ones as is often the case. Children are energetic, playful, curious and delicate beings and they should be treated as such. The reality of most schools, however, is that they gradually take away the sense of youth from the young in the name of teaching them knowledge and discipline and preparing them for their future lives in the "real" world. It is often forgotten that poor children lead a "real" life, in the sense that they are introduced to the harsh and unpleasant realities of life from an early age. And "real" life for children includes learning, discovering and playing at the same time. In fact, what is artificial is the school itself that imparts dry information through the use of rigid teaching methods with little or no attention to the child's playful and curious nature. In order to make school both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating, the following steps may be undertaken:

a) *Include Co-Curricular Activities* by adding singing, dancing, painting, performing, story-telling and field trips to the curricular content and making them part of the daily routine of the school. It should be noted that the term co-curricular as opposed to extra-curricular activities is used here to convey the message that fun activities should not occur only outside class hours, but, rather, within them. A child who enjoys school will not choose to leave it easily and parents will have a more difficult time in pulling him/her out.

b) *Beautify the School* by painting the classroom and its furniture with bright colours; decorating it with local handicrafts and posters drawn by the children; and maintaining a school garden filled with flowers and plants. All the above tasks may be accomplished by the children themselves with the voluntary help of community members. First, however, schools must be provided with electricity, water and latrines.

c) *Use Interactive Teaching Methods* that stimulate the child intellectually; bring about close student-teacher relations; promote

creativity, independence and self-esteem; and teach analytical/critical thinking. The use of participatory instructional methods that include problem-solving, discovery learning and question/answer renders the teaching/learning process fun and stimulating. This results in close relations between teacher and student, based on mutual trust and respect, as well as a sense of joy in learning. The child who views his/her teacher as one who can open the doors to discovery and learning, as opposed to a distant authoritarian figure who merely imparts dry information, is more likely to persist in school. Even if the formal setup of the class or its overcrowded condition does not allow for such innovation, a free period may be allotted daily or weekly in which interactive teaching-learning methods are implemented.

d) Establish a Cultural Center in the form of a multi-functional library that may be used for exhibiting the students' paintings or handicrafts, for theater, puppet or pantomime performances, and even as study space for those whose home environment does not provide them with privacy and quiet to do their homework. The library books and magazines may be provided by NGOs and volunteer groups, but the maintenance and decoration of the cultural center should be the responsibility of the children themselves in order to bring about a sense of creativity and commitment; the message is that this place belongs to them and they are the ones responsible for it.

vi) Abolish Physical and Psychological Punishment

Most unfortunately, physical punishment and psychological humiliation still prevail in many schools, especially in poor areas. Many teachers still resort to beating pupils or using harsh words to maintain discipline or establish authority. A child whose pride and dignity are hurt will have a hard time returning to the school, especially since he/she knows that the school administration or the family rarely provide any support if he/she complains.

The result may be school leave before completion. Thus, serious effort should be made to prevent any physical or psychological harm to the child.

4. Delegate Responsibility to the Students

Serious effort should be made to transform students from passive consumers of knowledge to active partners in education. Students should be asked to help each other. This will not only be of assistance to school authorities, but also create a sense of responsibility and commitment among school children. The above can be achieved through various means:

i) Provide Peer Counselling

Classmates can be sensitized to identify the academically weaker members of their group. Often, students themselves realize that a friend is falling behind or not achieving as expected. In such cases, students should be prompted to follow up the matter and identify whether the problem is caused by in-school or out-of-school factors. Fellow students may find it easier to confide in one another without fear of punishment. In addition, they may be able to help each other without referring to school authorities. One such aid provided is peer tutoring.

ii) Use Child-to-Child Help

Academically capable students can help weaker ones before the problem reaches the point of no return and leads to school drop-out. Both individualized and group tutoring, closely supervised by the teacher, are an effective way of providing remedial education and enrichment programmes especially for difficult subjects such as science, mathematics and geography. Child-to-child help can be promoted and encouraged by rendering it part of the community work required at school. Once again, the sense of involvement brought about by such cooperative efforts is a most welcome contribution to preventing drop-out.

iii) Establish Graduates' Clubs

No role model can be as effective as a recent graduate advocating the benefits of education. Successful graduates for whom education has made a difference should be mobilized to raise the community members' awareness to and alleviate the concerns of families regarding the utility of schooling, especially for girls. An active network of graduates can also provide academic and psycho-social guidelines for those most prone to drop out from school. Private advocacy as well as public speeches by graduates leave a lasting impression on those who can envisage themselves as the future graduates.

5. Introduce Organizational Reform

Field studies conducted in the MENA region point to various administrative rules and regulations as reasons for school drop-out. Compulsory wearing of uniforms, periodical examinations and the assignment of homework are among the factors stated by teachers, students and their parents as those that facilitate drop-out. A realistic evaluation of various organizational regulations in terms of their role in school drop-out may convince educational planners and policy makers to introduce necessary reforms. Among such reforms are:

i) Non-enforcement of Compulsory School Uniforms

Poor students have been found to be required to leave school for not having a "decent-looking" uniform. Obtaining a school uniform is a hidden cost of education, one that many poverty-stricken families cannot afford. Embarrassment over the lack of uniform or the possession of an old and worn-out one poses itself as an obstacle to school attendance. It is truly a shame for any system of education to deprive the young ones of the opportunity to learn merely because they do not possess a uniform. Any schooling system that believes in the strict enforcement of compulsory uniforms should provide them to disadvantaged children. Otherwise, uniforms should be abandoned in communities that cannot afford them. The abandonment of the school uniform in these conditions should be accompanied by active encouragement

of local costumes owned by the rural and nomadic populations, so as to prevent any blow to the self-esteem of the children and their families.

ii) Reduce/Eliminate Homework

Another factor that has been found responsible for bringing about school drop-out is the student's inability to complete his/her homework and the consequent embarrassment and/or punishment. Children living in illiterate, overcrowded home environments do not have the time or the space to do their homework or cannot seek the help of the elderly to complete it. Unless schools establish the necessary study space or provide the supervision needed, it is not realistic to expect children to finish their assignment. Should homework be deemed an essential part of the learning process, a specific period of time should be included in the daily schedule of classes during which schoolchildren can complete their home assignment.

iii) Increase School-Parents Communication

School authorities often ignore the role of parents in the struggle against drop-out, especially if the latter are poor and illiterate. Yet, as discussed in detail in earlier sections, parental involvement and cooperation are among the key factors of school attendance. Awareness-raising campaigns can be launched through parent-teacher associations where families may be invited to discuss reasons for school pull-out and offer solutions in turn. Mutual respect and trust between the school and the family ease the burden of both when faced with the danger of drop-out.

iv) Introduce Diagnostic Evaluation

Early identification and diagnosis of problems that may eventually lead to school drop-out can be achieved through formative evaluation. Whether through diagnostic tests or peer or professional counselling, it is important to identify the problem and provide remedial measures before it is too late. Yet it is crucial to prevent any labeling at this stage. It should be kept in mind that underachievers are identified in order to be helped, not hurt.

v) Send Follow-Up Teams

Administrative measures should be undertaken in order to assure follow-up of cases prone to school drop-out. Sending follow-up teams of educators and administrators to schools where potential dropouts have been identified and reported is a mechanism that assures that the issue will be pursued through enriching activities and remedial measures until the desired outcome is achieved. Every precaution should be taken to prevent public identification and labeling, otherwise the entire effort will only hurt the child and his/her family.

vi) Enforce Automatic Progression

Compulsory examinations at the primary school level create much stress and strain for the young child, who may develop an early aversion to the school. Furthermore, it creates a sense of competition too early to be healthy and constructive in terms of character development. The sense of inability and weakness brought about by failure in examinations also undermines the child's self-esteem. Despite all of the above, educational systems in the MENA region, as in many other countries of the world, continue to be exam-oriented.

On the other hand, countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Malaysia have successfully experimented with automatic progression across the primary cycle, the result of which has been the elimination of school drop-out and the attainment of universal primary education (UNESCO 1984).

In order to be effective and educationally useful, automatic progression in grades needs to be coupled with continuous evaluation. This can detect early learning problems and provide educational measures to overcome difficulties, thus enabling the promotion of the child with the rest of the class. Continuous progression should also be accompanied by individualized instruction for both the under and overachievers in order to maximize the potential of both. The introduction of automatic progression as

an action recommendation is based on the belief that not much is achieved if the child fails, except for repetition and possible drop-out, whereas continuous progression at the primary cycle provides the minimum skills needed by the child. International experiences have pointed to automatic promotion and the abolition of repetition as effective measures in preventing school drop-out.

vii) Enable Drop-outs to Return to School

In order to prevent relapse into illiteracy, school drop-outs should be helped to return to the formal educational system. Providing remedial education through individualized learning modules and using placement tests to enable school drop-outs to gain accreditation are among the steps undertaken to make the latter return to the formal school.

In general, the above-mentioned measures are attempts to render the school adaptable to the special needs of those most prone to drop out. Since it is not possible or realistic to ask for the total restructuring of the school system, the above recommendations are only reform actions deemed essential for making the school child-friendly. One may, however, find that the introduction of the above reforms cannot prevent the children from dropping out of school. Functional and cost-effective as they may be, reforms are exactly that -- reforms -- and not structural changes that truly make the school cater to the needs of the most vulnerable. In such cases, one may turn to non-formal alternatives that are not necessarily bound by the rules and regulations of the formal school, and have an expanded outreach capacity due to their openness and flexibility.

6. Provide Non-formal Education Alternatives

A word of caution is in order before turning to non-formal education. Disadvantaged families have long believed in the role of the formal school as a key to upward social mobility. They have sacrificed in order to send their children to school, believing that formal education will help them move away from poverty and deprivation. It is also true that the ability of the school has been questioned by many

who have seen it not as an element of change, as expected, but rather as an instrument of stability and a promoter of the existing status quo. Despite harsh criticism by specialists and lay people alike, the formal schooling system still remains the single, most believed-in institution of empowerment and equalization. Therefore, a few points need to be taken into consideration before we can make non-formal education alternatives attractive and effective in the MENA region.

First, non-formal education should at no time be regarded as an inferior or second-hand alternative. Just as the experience of technical-vocational education has illustrated, any form of education that deviates from the formal school, and is offered to disadvantaged children as a second choice (academic education being the first choice) through a discriminatory process of tracking, is not deemed desirable by parents and not taken seriously by leaders. It is not surprising to find many non-formal education programmes being abandoned due to the low demand of families for such alternatives. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure that non-formal learning centers provide parallel and equally accredited, government-recognized education, enabling their users to easily transfer to the formal schooling system whenever desired. It is, therefore, important to note here that non-formal education in this context does not include all channels of communication available for education, collectively referred to as the third channel. As a result, whereas the mass media and the traditional forms of communication are potential partners in the endeavor to eliminate drop-out, they are not considered non-formal education alternatives per se due to their lack of accreditation.

To be effective, non-formal education alternatives should basically provide the core curriculum offered in formal schools in an innovative and flexible format that takes into consideration the local conditions. As such, the non-formal alternative will not be regarded as a complementary form of education but rather as real education. To be attractive, non-formal institutes of learning should abide by the principles of localization and relevance in that they should take into consideration local needs and impart relevant and useful skills. Ironically, parents prefer and reject the standard school curricula at the same time. On the one hand, the educational content is

questioned as being irrelevant to the daily lives of their children. On the other hand, non-formal alternatives that focus only on teaching "practical" skills are criticized for imparting the same information as that taught informally by the family and nothing more. In order to respond to both reservations, non-formal alternatives can combine localization, adaptability, standardization, relevance and utility; they can offer a unique alternative that will eventually be equally in demand and not considered inferior. Successful programmes such as the BRAC in Bangladesh, Yemen's Rural schools, Sudan's Mobile schools and the community schools in Egypt can serve as examples of non-formal education endeavors in developing countries.

Non-formal education has many potential allies, including NGOs, voluntary groups, religious organizations, philanthropic groups and women's associations. The budget needed for school building, its facilities and educational materials may be provided by the above groups with complementary funds collected via the sale of local goods and handicrafts along with religious donations in the form of *Zakat*. Once convinced, community members can contribute through their labour to building schools and the necessary furniture.

The non-formal alternative will be able to cater to the demands of those prone to drop out by, first, assessing their needs (to which the formal school cannot respond adequately) and, second, adapting its structure and organization to the realities of their lives. Thus the non-formal education itself may be short and condensed and its time and place determined by the community. It can attract late entrants and overage children that the formal system will not enroll. Classes can be held for even a few students, whose number may not justify scheduling a class in the formal school. Mobile or tent school using nomadic teachers may be used for the shifting population. The content of education should include the core curriculum plus the teaching of life skills combined with co-curricular activities. The teaching-learning process could be based on interactive, participatory methods, with formative and diagnostic evaluation by the teacher and automatic progression between the grades replacing final examinations. Homework can also be reduced, allowing more time for community work and peer tutoring and thus bringing about a sense of responsibility and

commitment in the child. The teachers, preferably female, may be selected among local residents and should be equipped with instructional as well as psychological knowledge through intensive pre-and in-service training. The children can attend the programme in their native costumes without uniforms, with the funding organizations providing free textbooks and stationery for them. Nutrition can be secured from the school gardens, whose maintenance may be a source of pride for the children. In sum, the non-formal institute and the community can work hand in hand to provide an educational alternative for children whose life style does not allow them to complete the formal school.

e) Leadership-Oriented Recommendations

Leadership in this context refers to the educational authorities in each country, including decision makers, planners, policy makers and evaluators. Here, strategies are formulated in order to aid educational leaders in combating school drop-out. Once drop-out is viewed as a serious source of educational wastage, and sufficient political will exists to reduce or eliminate it, the following measures may be undertaken to accelerate the process:

1. Gather Accurate Data About School Drop-Out

Simple as the above may sound, the reality is that the educational data-collection system in many MENA countries is still characterized by inaccuracy and contradiction. Often, the information provided by various sources (i.e. Ministry of Education, National Statistical Center) is contradictory. Most often, the data is not disaggregated in terms of region (urban, rural, nomadic), gender and age.

It has also been found that numerous countries in the region have never collected any information on school repetition, drop-out, survival and completion. The initial move towards eliminating the problem is obtaining a realistic picture of the situation. Thus, collecting drop-out related data that takes into account gender, age and region may be the first step. Statistical information on drop-out needs to be collected and retrieved systematically,

like enrol!ment rates, and not whenever a study is being conducted on this issue. It is also crucial for each country to report the net enrollment ratio (NER) in addition to the gross enrollment ratio (GER) as a more accurate measure of access to education by excluding those out of the six and 11 year age range -- namely, the under- and over-age children.

2. Allocate Budget to Reduce School Drop-Out

Much may be said about the danger of school drop-out and the need to eliminate it. Yet the ultimate test is the financial commitment to the cause, as opposed to mere lip service. A specific portion of the education budget should be allotted to conducting studies on this problem and undertaking measures to reduce it.

3. Utilize Modern and Traditional Channels of Communication to Raise Public Awareness About Drop-Out

National public awareness campaigns conducted by leading educational authorities should accompany local efforts discussed earlier. Speeches by well-known educational figures on radio and television can play a key role in sensitizing the public to the occurrence of school drop-out and the reasons behind it. Given the receptivity of the population to television and radio programmes, the national broadcasting network can be used to transmit the message. Entertaining, as well as educational, programmes directed at families and school authorities, may be one of the most effective consciousness-raising tools. Furthermore, traditional centers of social gathering, such as bazaars, coffee houses, local markets, village centers or mosques, may also be used to convey the message.

4. Provide Opportunities to Continue Education

It may seem ironic to advocate secondary education in a study that focuses on the desertion of primary school. Field studies in the region, however, have pointed to the absence of hope to continue education as one of the reasons for drop-out.

Creating opportunities for further education can happen by establishing secondary schools and providing parallel education through non-formal alternatives or correspondence and evening schools. What is important is that the student and his/her family do not view primary school as a dead-end. The feeling of continuity and possible social mobility creates incentives to complete primary education.

5. Promote Fund-Raising Activities

Fund-raising activities that may include cultural events can mobilize potential partners, charitable individuals, religious groups, women's organizations, local associations, public figures, voluntary agencies, teachers' unions, parents' associations, private enterprises and political figures. Such programmes may attract the financial as well as human resources of the above-mentioned groups in an effort to eliminate school drop-out. Donations may then be used to sponsor disadvantaged children most prone to drop-out. Every effort should be made to gain the trust of donors and assure them that the money will be used solely for this purpose. One way of assuring the donors may be the systematic preparation of reports on how, where and when the money has been spent. Periodical visits by donors may also assure them of correct spending, but the tradition of anonymous donation found in many Muslim communities may discourage such visits.

6. Provide Education Loans

Interest-free education loans may be provided in order to create incentives among school authorities and address the drop-out problem successfully. Loans may be spent towards improving school conditions, hiring female teachers or building new facilities. The ultimate aim is to prevent drop-out through the means identified by the school and the community.

7. Foster Sister Schools

Sister schools are those that support each other through mutual assistance. Purposeful matching is made between rural and urban schools as

well as among city schools and rural institutions. This may be done within the same country or across countries in the region if political relationships allow. The aim is to mobilize the Big Sister (the school with high academic achievement rates, or the rich urban school) to support the Little Sister (the one that suffers from high non-completion rates, or the poor rural school) in its endeavor to reduce the number of drop-outs. The sense of camaraderie and commitment brought about by such a bond may prove to be effective in dealing with the problem.

The above recommendations are all aimed at reducing or eliminating school drop-out. Various groups have been identified to act as partners in this endeavor, including child, family, community, school and educational leaders. Since the above- mentioned partners work in a dialectical relationship with each other, strategies recommended act best when used in combination.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study aims at providing an assessment of the existing situation of primary school drop-out in the MENA region with an emphasis on girls' drop-out, followed by an identification and analysis of in-school and out-of-school factors leading to drop-out. The study ends with a series of action recommendations covering the areas most affected by school drop-out. It is clear that solving the drop-out problem is not an easy task that can be performed in isolation. It needs an integrated and multi-sectoral approach with the active participation of the school and educational authorities, the family and its larger community and the child. In conclusion, therefore, a reasons-recommendations matrix is provided in which the identified causes of school drop-out are matched with alternative solutions covering the different areas of action.

A close look at the causes of drop-out shows that primary school drop-out is mostly due to external factors, that are out of the child's control. In other words, social, cultural, economic and educational factors act together to push and pull the child out of school. Since changing the underlying causes of pull-out, especially the most common economic reasons, needs long-term planning and policy making, it is the school itself that must cater to the immediate needs and realities of the child's daily life. If such flexibility cannot be found in formal schools, non-formal alternatives have to be implemented. A two-pronged approach that conscienticizes and empowers the family and the community while adapting the school to the realities of life for the most vulnerable section of the population -- namely, the poor, rural girl child -- seems to be the most effective means of preventing school drop-out.

As far as the family and community are concerned, public awareness campaigns through the media and influential members of the community are the most rapid and effective means of bringing about consciousness regarding the importance of schooling and the dangers of drop-out. A close look at the campaigns held for family planning and health measures shows how traditional as well as modern means can be used in the region. Among the action recommendations, therefore, such measures as mobile counselling units (child-centered recommendations), educated role models, speakers and influential members of the community (community-centered recommendations) can act as the instruments of consciousness raising

at the local level, while the media (leader-ship oriented recommendations) can be used to raise public awareness on a larger scale.

As far as education-oriented recommendations are concerned, the school can play a crucial role through organizational reforms that render it child-friendly. The key role, however, is played by the teacher who remains the single most important actor in the teaching-learning process. Through their daily contact with the children, teachers can influence them and their families more than any other element. A good teacher who is equipped and supported can act as a mentor as well as an animator. None of the above measures can be effective if the teacher remains indifferent and passive since every outside act is filtered through the teacher within the classroom setting. The ideal teacher is the one who interacts with the child and his/her family and community, while involving and empowering them for the often difficult and challenging task of schooling. Therefore, exemplary teachers should be trained, supported and rewarded, while, at the same time, be held responsible and accountable for what occurs in the classrooms.

In conclusion, if one is to highlight the most important and effective action recommendations that can help the region confront the drop-out problem, one can state the following:

Pay attention to the drop-out problem. Many MENA countries do not pay enough attention to the danger of the drop-out phenomenon. It is often not realized that the education system of most countries in the region is inefficient and marked by chronic problems that can lead to future illiteracy. This situation can be addressed by collecting accurate data about school drop-out and allocating budget to reduce it.

Look at what happens inside the classroom. Most often, educational authorities and statisticians are content with having children enrolled in the school. Furthermore, quantitative indicators pointing to high gross and net enrollment rates are sufficient to raise confidence about the efficiency of the schooling system. What is needed, however, are qualitative indicators that illustrate what is happening within the four walls of the classroom. The

importance of the internal functioning of the school is demonstrated by the fact that drop-outs had access to formal education, yet the school was not able to retain them. To find out why, one must delve deep into the internal mechanism of the school and this may be done using qualitative research methods.

Raise the awareness of the family and the community regarding the dangers of school drop-out. The members of the family and the community are crucial partners in the battle against school drop-out. All action recommendations have limited success if the family and community are not convinced of the importance of keeping the child in school. Every effort should be made through traditional and modern means of communication to involve the family in the war against school wastage.

Help the child through organizational administrative reforms at the school level. In order to neutralize the impact of pull-out factors, the school must have enough flexibility to adapt to the conditions in which the child finds him/herself. In case centralization of the educational system does not allow for adaptability and flexibility, serious measures should be undertaken to activate a non-formal alternative designed to cater to the needs of the poor rural child.

Empower the teacher. The teacher can play a key role as an animator and agent of social change. He/she can act as a mediator between the school and the child and his/her family. The teacher has access to the hearts and minds of children and can leave a strong imprint on them. This can happen if the teacher is equipped and supported during his/her service and acknowledged for playing a multi-faceted role, beyond mere teaching and grading.

In general, the above recommendations are put forward to wage a serious and persistent battle against school drop-out in the region. The review of MENA countries studies clearly illustrates that many educational problems are rooted in socio-economic and

cultural issues that are hard to change. Yet it is contended at the end that the school itself should act as an agent of change to facilitate the children's access to and survival in schools. It may be too much to ask from the educational system, but the school must act as an ameliorative factor as it has done throughout the past decades.

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Girls' Drop-Out from Primary Schooling in the Middle East and North Africa: Challenges and Alternatives

By Golnar Mehran
Prepared for: UNICEF-MENARO
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DROP-OUT FACTORS: CHILD - CENTERED REASONS

- Dislike for School
- Fear of School
- Inability to Adapt to School
- Inability to Find Friends
- Jealousy and Competition
- Embarrassment
- Tardiness
- Absenteeism
- Over Age
- Under Age
- Language of Instruction Different from Mother Tongue
- No Preparatory Experience
- Physical Exhaustion
- Lack of Time
- Prolonged Illness
- Malnutrition
- Gap Between School and Home Culture
- Psychological Trauma
- Guilt Feeling
- Child Labour
- Internalization of Failure

PULL-OUT FACTORS: FAMILY - CENTERED REASONS

Socio - Cultural Causes

- Education - A Disservice
- No School for Married Girls
- Early Marriage Among Girls
- Irrelevance of Education for Girls
- Political Instability
- Deculturation of Education
- Questioning Education as Social Mobilizer
- Girl Child Having a Secondary Position
- Accepting School Drop-Outs
- Education - No Plus in Rural Life
- Traditional Work Distribution
- Discrimination Against Girls
- Community Indifference/Objection
- Family Objection to Distant Schools
- Co-educational Classrooms
- Illiterate Mother
- Parental Inability to Help Child
- Local Customs/Traditions
- Need for Girl-Child Labour at Home
- Overcrowded Home
- Illiterate Home Environment
- Lack of Awareness
- Parental Indifference

Economic Causes

- Preference for Free Non-formal Education
- Low Family Budget for Education
- Direct/Indirect Educational Cost
- Large Family Size
- Migration
- Parental Preference for Child to Learn a Vocation
- Parental Poverty

PUSH-OUT FACTORS: SCHOOL - CENTERED REASONS

Student Evaluation

- Failure and Repetition
- Absence of Formative/Diagnostic Evaluation
- Reliance on Exams

Curriculum/ Textbooks

- Late Distribution of Textbooks
- Little Recreation
- Early Fillerings
- Gender Incompatible
- Difficult Curricular Content
- Irrelevant Curriculum

Teacher/Teaching Methods

- No Psychological/Professional Support for Teachers
- Low Motivation/Morale Among Teachers
- Absence of Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Teacher-Centered Instruction
- Rigid Teaching Methods
- Use of Non-Native Teachers
- Poor Teacher Training
- Teacher Absenteeism

School/Classroom

- Low Quality Teaching
- Absence of Special Teachers
- Shortage of Teachers
- Inadequate Pre-and In-Service Teacher Training
- Lack of Psychological Services
- No School Health Units
- Lack of Space for Studying / Completing Homework
- Lack of Sanitary Services
- No Special Education for Disabled Children
- Inability to Address Learning Disabilities
- Lack of Upper Grades
- Lack of Advocacy/Social Mobilization
- No School - Parent Communication/Cooperation
- Lack of School Accountability
- No Teacher Follow-Up
- Compulsory Education not Implemented
- Mismatch Between School Calendar and Daily/Seasonal Life
- Lack of Boarding/Mobile Schools
- No Classes Held
- Malshift Schools/Overcrowded Classrooms
- Deteriorated School Facilities
- Long Distance Between Home and School

REASONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

CHILD - CENTERED RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Preparatory Training
- Provide Pre-School Services
- Use Nonformal Alternatives
- Provide Home-Based Early Childhood Development

Provide Continued Education for Drop-Outs
- Provide Mobile Counseling Units
- Provide Peer Tutoring
- Establish Houses of Culture
- Provide Post - Literacy Classes
- Use Alternative Centers of Learning
- Provide Vocational Training
- Educate Through the Media

FAMILY - CENTERED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Involve the Family
- Conscientictize the Family
- Empower the Family

COMMUNITY CENTERED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Introduce Educated Role Models
- Invite Speakers
- Mobilize Influential Community Members

LEADERSHIP ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Gather Accurate/Disaggregated Data
- Allocate Budget to Reduce Drop-Out
- Raise Public Awareness About Drop-Out
- Provide Opportunity to Continue Education
- Promote Fund Raising
- Provide Educational Loans
- Foster Sister Schools

EDUCATION ORIENTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Adapt School to Local Conditions & Needs
- Adjust the School Calendar
- Render the Curriculum Useful/Relevant

Equip The Teachers
- Provide Pre-Service Training
- Establish In-Service Training/Support
- Train Local Teachers
- Promote Teachers as Animators
- Beware of Hidden Curriculum
- Reward Exemplary Teachers

Make The School Child - Friendly

Render school fun & attractive
- Reduce Distance Between Home and School
- Provide Gender Segregated Classrooms
- Employ Female Teachers
- Provide Free Nutrition
- Include Co-Curricular Activities
- Beautify the School
- Use Interactive Teaching
- Establish Cultural Centers
- Abolish Physical/Psychological Punishment

Delegate responsibility to students
- Provide Peer Counseling
- Introduce Community Work
- Establish Graduates' Club

Introduce Organizational Reform
- Do Not Enforce Compulsory School Uniform
- Reduce/Eliminate Homework
- Increase School-Parents Communication
- Use Diagnostic Evaluation
- Send Follow-Up Teams
- Use Automatic Progression
- Enable Drop-Outs to Return to School
- Provide Nonformal Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE